

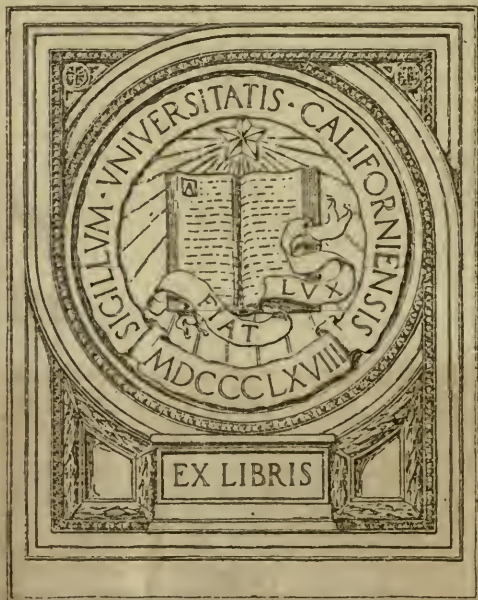
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THE FUTURE LIFE.

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CHAPTER I.

FIRST THOUGHTS.

THE subject of this little work is one that will never grow old. As soon as man came to be really conscious of his life here, he began to have dim forebodings, vague hopes, and haunting fears concerning a life hereafter. It seems a part of what we may call the very *make* of man, that he shall ask what is beyond the boundaries of the seen. "If a man die, shall he live again?" is one of the oldest questions he has asked. Nor is it likely that the question will ever cease to be asked or cease to interest; unless, indeed, the whole of our present conditions of being and limitations of knowledge should be completely altered, and faith and hope be changed for sight.

A thousand incidents in life, a thousand

thoughts, hopes, instincts, longings, forebodings, impel us to think of the mysterious unseen; to turn towards that "undiscovered country" our wistful gaze; to question reason, conscience, science, faith, and hope, if perchance light may shine for us along the path that so many well-loved feet have gone. Some there are who put aside the subject as a subject for continuous investigation or consideration, because they do not cherish any hope that the problem is capable of any solution; but they cannot dismiss it from their hearts; unless, indeed, by a long sustained or vigorous effort they have contrived to cut themselves adrift from what they regard as the superstitions of mankind: but these are exceptional cases; and it remains true that the vast majority of human beings are tenderly sensitive in regard to this great question, and must fervently long for light that may increase or lead to hope or faith.

Life itself is confessedly a mystery,—not only the future but the present life. An acute French writer lately said that "an expanse of darkness, empty or peopled, envelopes the narrow circle wherein flickers our little lamp." All we can see is that around us there are objects of interest innumerable. Sometimes we venture, or force our way, a little beyond the narrow

circle lit by the tiny lamp we carry; and then we find how little we know, but never know how much we have to explore. What lies beyond we do not know: nay, we do not know where we are, or whence the lamp has come, or who the little creature is that carries it. We do not understand ourselves. No one knows what life is; no one knows how the brain thinks, or how matter in motion or in certain chemical conditions can result in thought. But our ignorance is our hope. Is it possible to believe that the forms and manifestations of life known to us are the only or the highest forms and manifestations of life? Is it not, on the contrary, an irresistible inference from every fresh glimpse of the wonder-world through which we are groping our way, that forms of manifestations of life inconceivably subtle and potent may come to light in time; to say nothing of the sphere of life and energy that has too long been regarded as the sphere of the "supernatural"? It was not a dreamer but a man of science of the highest eminence, and a demonstrator of the correlation of physical forces, who said that "myriads of organised beings may exist imperceptible to our vision, even if we were among them." Coleridge, in his translation of Schiller's words, only expressed

a feeling that is as new as it is old, and as old as it is new, when he asked :—

“Where are now the fabled beings that peopled space ?
The intelligible forms of ancient poets,
The fair humanities of old religion,
That had their haunts in dale or piny mountain,
Or forest by slow stream, or pebbly spring,
Or chasms and wat’ry depths ; all these have vanished,
They live no longer in the faith of reason !
But still the heart doth need a language ; still
Doth the old instinct bring back the old names.
Oh ! never rudely will I blame his faith
In the might of stars and angels !
This visible nature, and this common world,
Is all too narrow.”

Yes, that is the one great and glorious certainty :—“This common world is all too narrow.” We cannot see beyond it, but we are compelled to draw inferences that carry us beyond it : and the scientific imagination which a Tyndall justifies and praises, as well as the religious instinct which a Martineau postulates and employs, helps us or compels us to draw these inferences. It may be argued that this line of thought will only lead to the confession of ignorance which may be deemed equivalent to a kind of agnosticism. Nothing would be more useful in our own day than the thorough facing of such a suggestion. We have nothing to fear from the confession of ignorance ; and many things to hope from an earnest-minded

and right-hearted agnosticism. The confession of ignorance at all events shuts out denial: that is something. It may even lead to a fresh ground of hope. To know that we do not know, only because there is so much to know, is a totally different thing from deciding that we do not know simply because we are only staring into vacancy. There is an agnosticism that is simply conceited, masterful, and insolent; but there is an agnosticism that may lead a man to a "hope that maketh not ashamed:" for it is just when we begin to realise the vastness of the universe and the limitations of our faculties that we may begin to cherish the truest and the tenderest kind of hope,—a hope, not based indeed on knowledge, but actually on want of knowledge, in the sense that the very magnitude of the unrealised constrains to awe, to a sense of littleness and a sense of dependence, and justifies the religious instincts and affections in passing on beyond the sphere of the known, where "faith and hope and love" may find what the eye has not seen, what the ear has not heard, and what has not entered into the heart of man to conceive.

This consideration underlies more or less all that follows in these pages. The future

life must, to a very great extent, be always a matter of inference; at present, it must be almost entirely a matter of inference: but the inference may come to have a strong cumulative value as the subject is contemplated from many points of view; so that, at last, hope may possibly ripen into "the full assurance of faith."

At the same time, there is another consideration of very great importance which will increasingly be regarded by thoughtful persons as of value. It is this,—that the introduction of the idea of a future life throws a perfectly wonderful light upon the present life, and makes it an immeasurably nobler thing in every way. A late atheistic writer actually assured us that atheism would give us "a nobler estimate of man." It is amazing! Will it be a nobler estimate of man to say that instead of being a creature in process of development, destined to an eternity of progress, his education, his hope, and his life, are limited to the present confused and narrow scene? Will it be a nobler estimate of man to reduce him to the level of "the beasts that perish,"—who is more knowing only that he may be more miserable, and who is more capable only that he may be more baffled and broken? Will it

be a nobler estimate of man to tell him that he can love, only to lose; that he can labour, only to be disappointed; that he can hope, only to be blotted out; and that, however much he may lift himself above the tyranny of material things, however much he may develop and educate his higher powers, he is only decking himself for a funeral, and growing a glorious manhood for the grave? Right or wrong, the believer in a future life, has, at all events, the noblest, nay, the only noble estimate of man; and, if he is wrong, then mankind is simply unspeakably poorer than he believes him to be. Right or wrong, he has the only estimate of man that offers to do him perfect justice, and that gives him hope of adequate education and advancement.

John Stuart Mill, without being a believer, saw this plainly enough. Hence, in his last message to a world to which he had rendered such signal service, he said:—"The beneficial effect of the indulgence of hope with regard to the government of the universe and the destiny of man after death, is far from trifling. It makes life and human nature a far greater thing to the feelings, and gives greater strength as well as greater solemnity to all the sentiments which are awakened in us by our fellow-creatures and

by mankind at large. It allays the sense of that irony of Nature which is so painfully felt when we see the exertions and sacrifices of a life culminating in the formation of a wise and noble mind, only to disappear from the world when the time has just arrived at which the world seems about to begin reaping the benefit of it. The truth that life is short and art is long is from of old one of the most discouraging parts of our condition; this hope admits the possibility that the art employed in improving and beautifying the soul itself may avail for good in some other life, even when seemingly useless for this. But the benefit consists less in the presence of any specific hope than in the enlargement of the general scale of the feelings; the loftier aspirations being no longer in the same degree checked and kept down by a sense of the insignificance of human life—by the disastrous feeling of ‘not worth while.’ The gain obtained in the increased inducement to cultivate the improvement of character up to the end of life is obvious, without being specified.” These weighty words will not lose but gain in force as time goes by. The development of mankind, the advances of civilisation, the creation, in fact, of a higher type of human being, with

interests and hopes that must keep pace with his own advancement, will add immensely to the value of the argument derived from a consideration of life here as a scene of enterprise and education,—as a preparation for results and advancements beyond the incident we call *death*. A heightened sense of the value of human life and the sanctity of human love can only lead to the conclusion that death will not end all; that death is really only promotion to a higher life; that “the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

One other consideration will certainly deepen and intensify this conclusion, the more it is pondered:—that, in whatever sense we believe in God at all, in that sense we must also believe He must love the good and desire their continued existence. It is difficult to think of the gracious and the good as really dead; it is difficult to believe in the possibility of that pathetic waste. Francis W. Newman, in his thoughtful and beautiful work, *Hebrew Theism*, puts this well:—

“Those who feel how far the Moral is better than
the Material,

Find it hard to believe that true virtue can ever
perish,

That which has God's nature seems to them immortal as God ;

A noble sentiment, having nothing superstitious,
Nothing of mere fantasy and superficial credulity,
But springing up assuredly out of spiritual depths.
And as love is the noblest and best of the affections,
So eminent in glory, that we pronounce it Divine,
The poet is praised, who denies that Love can die.

But when those who stand over the grave of a
) virtuous friend

Lose faith in immortality, they grieve and lament,
Not merely that their friend loses happiness, or
they their friend,

(For in every case they lose him,) but, that Virtue
should perish,

That the Estimable and Lovely should exist no more.

This is no fond selfishness or foolish grief,

If that is lost to existence, which is of all things
most valuable.

Rather, we could not be virtuous, if we did not
grieve ;

And if death is to be eternal, why not also grief?

But if Virtue grieves thus for lost Virtue justly,

How then must God, the fountain of virtue, feel?

If our highest feelings, and the feelings of all the
) holy,

Guide rightly to the Divine heart, then it would
grieve likewise

And grieve eternally, if goodness perish eternally.

* * * * *

If then we must not doubt that the highest has
deep love for the holy,

Such love as man has for man, in pure and sacred
friendship,

We seem justly to infer, that those whom God
loves are deathless :

Else would the Divine blessedness be imperfect and
impaired."

Nor is this argument less impressive if we drop from it the personal element, and think of God only as a Power working through the countless ages for this very thing,—the development of man, and of man in his highest condition, as wise, and just, and noble, and good. That Power which works through such inconceivable periods of time, and, with infinite patience, through such incalculable and minute stages, must, in a sense, be counted to be thwarted and despoiled if her children perish; and must be thought of as eternally heartless or sorrowful, pitiless or miserable, if her sublimest and loveliest creations are evolved only to be hidden in a grave. We know but little, but we have surely every reason to hope and believe that nature is not betraying us in leading us on to the expectation that we shall not die but live, and carry on to diviner issues the never completed work of earth and time.

CHAPTER II.

THE FUTURE LIFE FORESHADOWED BY THE LAW OF EVOLUTION.

THE great scientific word of our day is "Evolution." It is a word which marks one of the most fruitful discoveries or generalisations of our time. It points out the profound law of life by which all things come into being, not by chance, not by miracle, not by so-called "supernatural" agencies or volitions, but by orderly processes, through the "survival of the fittest" and the development of possibilities hidden in manifold forms of life and their environments. By its help we have traced the origin of man to very lowly sources, and have marked his career, in an ascending scale, to his present place in a world he is going on to possess. Paul, in one of his many remarkable anticipations of modern thought, had this truth in mind when he said "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now: and not only so, but ourselves also, who have the first-fruits of the spirit." "The whole creation," conscious or

unconscious, seems to moan with its birth-pains, the sorrowful but prophetic intimations of future unfoldings: and man, who has attained "the first-fruits of the spirit," is not exempt; for he is not yet perfect; and the winning of the spirit only strikes out from him a new sighing and moaning for the unrealised, the unattained.

What will come of all these human aspirations, discontents, longings, struggles, hopes, and fears? Paul tells us. He is full of hope. He sees in this very conflict something that inspires him with confidence. He hears in this aspiring cry a coming psalm of praise. We are not at rest, because we have a destiny to fulfil: we are not content, because we have something to seek: we are not happy, because the true end of life is not yet attained. The sighing of nature only echoes the sighing of man. No wonder that a refined, tender, sympathetic thinker like Paul took all this into his heart, and heard there the plaintive cry of a world in pain. But he has an abounding consolation. He believes in the heavenly harmony, as the solution of all earthly discords and incompletenesses. He hears everywhere the undertone of sadness; but everywhere it prophesies of better things to come.

The history of the world, as we know it, abundantly confirms the insight of the seer. The more we know of its history in the past, and of the laws that control the life of the present and prepare the life of the future, the more clearly we see that Progress rules everywhere. In truth, what Shakspeare says of man we may also say of the world on which he dwells, that "there's a divinity doth shape" its "ends," however "rough hewn" they may be. There was a time when the earth was not habitable; and again there was a time when it was only habitable for creatures whose hideous or monstrous remains, preserved in the great stone book, help to unfold the wonderful revelations of "creation." There was a time when "the whole creation" literally "groaned and travailed in pain." Fire, water, and ice, were the three mighty artists and artisans that shaped our valleys, flung up or carved our mountains, cut out our river courses, spread our seas, constructed our islands, and levelled our continents. But this groaning and travelling in pain was the sign, not of death but of life: and now, where tempests and torrents had their hideous way, rich valleys smile, and broad mountains treasure up the sweet airs of heaven, and glorious seas and rivers carry the

traffic of the world. These mighty changes came, for the most part, not as sudden convulsions, but as orderly developments: and at last man came in, to find that nature, with many labours, had prepared for him a home.

The story of man's development has been a repetition of the history of the globe on which he dwells. Through what struggles has he passed! Tempests have tried him; fire has searched him; his "rough hewn" nature has been "shaped" by the mighty forces that build and break the social, political, and religious refuges of the world. Races have been developed, and nations have been created and educated, only with groaning and pain: and, without suffering, they have entered into no heritage of good. How restless men have been! how hungry in their curiosity; how eager in their research; how courageous in their discoveries; how defiant in their demands; how weary, and way-worn, and broken-hearted all through! But what has been the end of it,—nay! the end is not yet,—what is coming of it all? The great doctrine of our time, as yet only half elaborated and half understood, turning as it does upon the struggle for life and the survival of the fittest, seems at first the revelation of a harsh law in nature. We see the

weak dying out before the strong, the unadapted giving place to the fit, the incapable perishing before the capable; and the sight is apt to leave on the mind the impression that nature cares only for the type, not for the man. But we must remember that it is, at any rate, the survival of "the fittest" that is aimed at. Nature, then, is steadily working for the fit, the beautiful, the harmonious: it is, in that sense, the "Power not ourselves that makes for righteousness." Hence, Nature is neither blind nor cruel. As we listen and watch, we hear a gentle voice beyond the sighing of her children; we see the gleaming in of the light of a glorious face; we feel that a loving heart is beating where we thought there was only an iron hand.

When, then, we come to man who has attained to "The first fruits of the spirit" the problem deepens. He is conscious of new wants, new affections, new hopes; he "moves about in worlds not realised." Paul says that we are sighing, waiting for our "redemption,"—"the redemption of the body." Does he mean redemption *from* the body? Here, at all events, is a new meaning in the ever recurring sigh of nature. Here is a new development foreshadowed, a new departure in this marvellous process of evolution. It is as though the beautiful

moth could be heard moaning and sighing through the shell of the chrysalis; as though the eager spirit could be heard beating against the bars of its fleshly cage, and sighing for freedom: and the suggestion is that when death unbars the doors, it will soar away like a delivered bird—singing and soaring into the summer morning sky. Thus considered, there is no such thing as death: but what we have been calling death is a great promotion,—the emancipation of the bondsman, the liberation of the explorer, the coming into completer and purer possession of ourselves, ay! and of one another,—the emerging of severed souls, in an all-revealing and all-uniting world,

“Nature shuts the door after everything that passes, and pushes life onward in more perfected forms,” said a thoughtful Hebrew. Is not that true? and is it likely that what has been true of every stage of man’s career, that what has been true of every portion of his life, should not be true of the whole of his earth-life in relation to the great unseen? Is it possible to believe that the far-reaching process should come to an end just when it seems to be working out a result; and that the mental accumulations of a life and the spiritual products of so many toils should go with the

poor body into the grave? Said one of our modern prophets:—"It is when I behold the Himalayah heights of humanity—the Socrateses, the Spinozas, the Emersons, the rare peaks of spiritual greatness that seem evermore bathed in the pure sunlight of the ideal,—it is then that the hope blazes forth, and refuses to be quenched. And the great ground of this hope is the IMMEASURABLE VALUE OF THE HUMAN SOUL. Just in proportion as I realise that, and comprehend that a splendid soul is the *chef-d'œuvre* of nature, the artistic masterpiece of creativeness, the glorious efflorescence of a lapsed eternity, do I also become permeated and saturated with the hope that Nature who creates shall be wise enough to preserve.

. . . . To me the cosmos is a vast system of hieroglyphics, with a meaning behind the symbolism of form and colour and law, to which I find no lexicon but mind. This makes me hope noble things at last. But I am content not to know, since knowledge is to-day beyond my reach,—content to see in human life now and here enough to lend it moral dignity surpassing all else before my eyes. That is a deathless root of glorious hope. A demonstration? No. An argument? No. A ground of fixed conviction? No. Yet,

for all that, a ground of hope to one at least of the myriad tossed and tired minds that have put out to sea on the vast ocean of modern thought—worthless to others, I doubt not, yet not withheld when one wistful voyager calls to another across the waves, ‘Brother, whither are we bound?’”

Evolution is God’s method of creating, and none the less the working out of purpose because it is the expression or outcome of law or potential energy. If some intelligent being could have stood by, as onlooker, at the time when the globe was a chaotic mass of gaseous and metallic matter, rolling on lifeless and formless under its awful canopy of cloudy fire mist, would it have been easy to believe that it could ever be evolved into the world of beauty we know to-day? Equally difficult would it have been to anticipate the advent of man when only creatures that crawled possessed the earth,—or, later on, to have heard in the hideous gibberings of uncouth beasts the rudiments of human speech and song. Not less difficult would it have been to see at work, in the first rude forms of aggregated life in savage communities, the urgent personal rights, needs, longings, and instincts that have led on to our complex modern civilisation. In

like manner "it doth not yet appear what we shall be;" but, (if we can once overcome the delusion that what we know as matter is necessary to life) it is not more difficult to follow man into the unseen, to win there developments of life as much advanced beyond his present stage of evolution as this is superior to the earlier stages of his career when the brute element dominated his entire nature, and his few wants had only taught him to utter a hideous cry.

In those early stages mutual helpfulness was almost, if not entirely, unknown. There, the law of selection through the survival of the fittest worked itself out unchecked by any, or by but very few, of the gracious ethical, emotional, and spiritual adjustments and rectifications that come with the higher stages. The maimed, or old, or useless member of a group was pitilessly destroyed, perhaps eaten. "Every one for himself" was the law of life in those low social latitudes. But, as humanity develops and civilisation advances, all kinds of subtle checks come in to modify or complicate those first rough outworkings of the law of the survival of the fittest. The deeper fountains of the spirit are reached, and the sighing of the nature touched by "the

firstfruits of the spirit" is heard. It is found that muscle is not everything; that to be an able fighter or hunter is not everything; that there is something in poetry, and the laughter of children, and the pathos of age, and the struggles of the weak, and the sorrows of the unfortunate. It is found that weakness, and deformity, and old age, and ignorance, are not things to smite out of our path as hindrances, but things to take account of, to spend thought upon, to pity, even to love: and so this law of the survival of the fittest comes to have a deeper, richer, diviner, significance, in the survival, not only of the fittest to fight and hunt, but the fittest to think, and forecast, and plan, and pity, and love, or even the fittest to be planned for, pitied, and loved: and thus a new kind of man is evolved, whose face seems to shine with the light, and whose heart seems to beat to the music of a higher world.

We have but to carry this glorious process onward into the unseen, in order to obtain one of the most rational and delightful conceptions of a future life. That life, properly understood, is only another step in the wonderful development of man's being: it is evolution still, but evolution into and in the

sphere of mind. The earth-process results in the creation of a man: the process, continued in the spirit-world, may result in the creation of a being as unlike the man of to-day as the man of to-day is unlike the brute from which he sprang. This is a thought which cannot help raising to an indefinite degree our conception as to what man really is, what he is living for, and what he may become. Given that man is a creature whose personal life and interests are bounded by the cradle and the grave, he is one kind of creature; but given that he is a being in course of development, and that this present life, in the sphere of matter, is only one of his stages of existence, he is then an altogether different kind of being, and the world is to him an altogether different kind of world. The whole out-look is changed. The whole calculation is altered.

On this subject, although special consideration will be given to the scientific basis of belief in a future life, distinct reference may here be profitably made to a very remarkable book by Ernest Haeckel, of Jena, a well-known writer of the militant materialistic school. This book, in Dr. Aveling's translation, is entitled "The Pedigree of Man," and it is

in that we find the most significant suggestion of our day concerning man's evolution into the spirit-sphere. The book is published in the interest of materialism in science and atheism in religion; but it is a very significant specimen of a decidedly modern kind of book, which may yet bless where it was expected to curse. We are taken by it, and in a most charming manner, into the wonder-world opened to us by the late Charles Darwin; and, in a way that has not been surpassed, we are shown the mighty, the exquisite, the far-reaching processes at work. It is all so lovely, so orderly, so wise, that it will be the most wonderful thing of all if here and there a sceptical reader does not look up and say, 'But who is doing and determining it all?' One chapter will be supremely likely to do this. It is entitled "Cell-souls and Soul-cells," and contains a revelation of surprising beauty and suggestiveness. Of course, the word "soul" is used by Haeckel in a sense of his own, and, so used, is equivalent to some such phrase as sense-organ or life centre. But "the soul" with him is, nevertheless, a very real thing, having its own "developmental history." All living creatures have cell-souls, according to Haeckel: every cell has its own soul, that

which endows it with sensation. "Countless as the stars in heaven are the endless myriads of cells which compose the frame" of any animal; but every cell is alive and, in a sense, independent, having its own separate work to do, its separate sensations to receive and deal with. But "the higher the development of the animal," the more is centralisation secured, by means of "the mighty central director, the nerve-centre, the brain,"—"the more complete is the centralisation of the cell-monarchy." These "nerve-cells" of the brain or "soul-cells" (different from cell-souls in being thought-movers and uniters, if not thought-creators) "form the central directing organ of the whole of the multicellular body." They "rise high above all other kinds of cell." They "effect that most important and enigmatical work that we denote by the word Ideation. They in the higher animals, as in man, effect that most exalted of all functions of the soul,—that of thinking and of perception, reason and consciousness." This looks vastly like evolution carried into the region of what we ordinarily call soul or "spirit"; and Haeckel still further enables us to say that. He says, "The study of the souls of animals reveals to us a long series of evolution." "The complex molecular

motions in the protoplasm of the soul-cells, whose highest consequence is imagination and thinking, reason and consciousness, have been gradually acquired, in the course of many millions of years, by Selection." The "special soul-cells are only met with in the higher animals in a central nervous system." "The primal elements of soul-life are in all living matter, in all protoplasm. But the grades of the upbuilding and composition of this soul vary in different living beings, and lead us gradually upward from the quiescent cell-soul through a long series of ascending steps to the conscious and rational soul of man," a unity, strictly a person, of whom surely we may say that he has been evolved through all these "many millions of years" with reference to some other consequence than being only a superior kind of beast of burden. Is it irrational or unscientific to say that this evolved man, now arrived at the highest stage, that of conscious, harmonious soul-life,—the monarchy of the whole self-hood,—may have acquired sufficient subtilty and unity of being to enable him, the thinking, self-conscious man, to hold together, to persist, to march out and on, when the cells disintegrate and the earth-work falls away?

“From harmony, from heavenly harmony,
This universal frame began :
From harmony to harmony
Through all the compass of the notes it ran,
The diapason closing full in Man.”

CHAPTER III.

A SCIENTIFIC BASIS OF BELIEF IN A FUTURE LIFE.*

We have arrived at a grave crisis in relation to that which is the very life and soul of all religious faith and hope—belief in a Future Life—or as I prefer to state it, belief in life unbroken by the incident we call “death.” To a painful extent, to an extent that is far from appearing on the surface, unbelief or doubt has crept into the minds of even naturally religious men; and the dear old confidences of other days are rapidly becoming the dim hopes or vanished beliefs of these.

The cause of this lies right before us: there is no mystery in it. One might say, that, for the first time in Christendom the human mind is coming to the possession of itself. Hitherto, except in conspicuous instances of exceptional originality and daring, the human mind has been in bondage to authorities, to masterful mental tyrants or stifling spiritual fears. Heresy

* This chapter is a summary of a separate work on the subject, by Mr. Hopps.

has always been deemed a sin against God, and, as a rule, a crime against the State. Free-thought was once equivalent to atheism, while science and scientific training, except to a few, were unknown.

Now, on every hand, the process of emancipation goes rapidly on. Everywhere we are for freedom, for individuality, for reality, for science. In commerce we push free trade; in politics we demand perfect liberty; in the dissemination of opinions we glory in the absence of restraint; in religion we have adopted, as the very watchword of our Protestantism, "the right of private judgment," while the marvellous spread of scientific knowledge has led to a totally new demand for evidence and demonstration as the antecedent of all belief.

All these tendencies of our modern life have led one way. There has come an inevitable loosening of the hold of the mere asseverator, with his creeds, his traditions, or his texts. Once it sufficed that the priest declared, that the creed affirmed, that the Bible taught; but now, slowly and surely, all that is coming to an end with vast numbers, and these not the least thoughtful, earnest, and intelligent; and, with the strengthening of reliance upon knowledge, faith grows dim.

What then is needed? Clearly a basis for faith on something more solid than the piling up of verbal assurances. We want rational argument, direct evidence, or scientific explanation; and these we must have, or belief will die. It is a large demand; many will think it a hopeless one; but I have such faith in God and Nature, such faith in the glorious hidden possibilities of man and the realm of mystery that hems him in, that I believe all we need will come, and come just when we need. "I have many things to say unto you," said the wise brother Jesus, "but ye cannot bear them now." And so it is with our heavenly Father in His natural revelations to His children. The eye to see and the power to use are marvellously adjusted; and, through all the ages, run the two great streams of human power and divine disclosure; not because God is arbitrary or changeable, but because, by a beautiful law of harmonious adjustment, the consciousness of need leads to the discovery of the supply. Hence it is no matter of doubt with me, it is a certainty, that just in proportion as we really need evidence and fact these will rise upon us like the stately orb of day, when dreams are over, and the work of life begins.

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Having said thus much, I now desire to deprecate the inference that I am going to try to supply what is wanted. I am too conscious of the gravity of the need, and the immensity of the evidence required, to profess any such thing. I shall be content if I can indicate a road, and give one or two hints about what may be found in it. My one object will be to show that the very science which seems to be destroying is destined to be the glorious up-builder of our faith. I shall try to at least throw a ray of light upon this great fact—that science is carrying us in every direction into an unseen universe, and that this unseen universe is everywhere felt to be the sphere of causes, and the source and centre of all the essential elements and activities of creation. And here it is important to remark that the inquiry into a Future Life or an unseen universe is a strictly scientific one; and is, as one has said, “a proper branch of the physiology of the species.” It is only the accident of its connection with the question of rewards and punishments, and with considerations relating to the being and providence of God, that has made it a religious question. Rightly regarded, then, the subject of a future existence is a purely

scientific one, and might be or ought to be investigated as a part of the great inquiry into the physiological or psychological development of man. If we are to live again after what we call death; or, better still, if we are to live on through and beyond it, the cause of the persistence or continuity of being must be perfectly natural, and must be at this very moment in ourselves; and this is entirely an object of experiment and research.

To science then we turn, believing that science can only destroy our hope by giving us knowledge, and that it will only make an end of our faith by giving us evidence. At the same time, it must be borne in mind that our faculties are limited, and that science is relative to these capacities.

But beyond this natural and inevitable limitation to scientific knowledge, another limitation is imposed upon us by the fact that hitherto science has been pursued almost entirely in the realm of matter in its grosser forms; and that we are altogether new to the witness borne by it to the unseen universe.

For this and many other reasons, I shall content myself with being elementary and suggestive, expecting to demonstrate nothing, but hoping to indicate much, knowing that, in

addition to the difficulty created by our as yet very limited acquaintance with what we call science, but what is really only the outer rind and surface of science, we have also to contend against the fact that the large majority even of religious persons are only in the elementary stages of knowledge as to the philosophy of spirit:—as witness their infantile belief in the “resurrection at the last day” as the only way of restoring the dead to life, and the only way by which God will or can judge mankind. What can at present be said to people whose conception of a Future Life is the “rising again” of the exterminated body? or who, without reflection, and as by a coarse animal instinct, laugh to scorn the assertion that “a spirit” is a greater reality than a body? or who tell us they must give up belief in immortality altogether if the texts of Scripture they rely upon are in a book that is not infallible? It does not matter how good, or devout, or otherwise cultivated these people are; their ideas concerning spirit and spirit-life shew that in relation to this tremendous subject they are only children.

Now I want to help to alter that. I want to get myself and others accustomed to the thought that if people exist in another world they exist

there *as* "people," not as fantastic, stately, solemn or dreamy angels; that if a man exists beyond the change called death, he is still a man, unchanged except that he has put off his body, and glided behind the veil. For a Future Life can only mean one thing, if it is to be a reality, and not a mere sentiment and solemn self-delusion, — it can only mean *the actual going-on of the human being in spite of the incident called "death."* If it is not that, it is nothing: if it is not that, we are only indulging in vain fancies: if it is not that, we may be pleasant poets singing of a "choir invisible" that has no real existence, but we are not actual pilgrims going to "a better country, that is a heavenly."

In our study of the unseen universe from the standpoint of science, and in appealing to science for evidence, it must ever be borne in mind that the difference between matter and spirit, whatever that difference may be, is not the difference between the known and the unknown, the conceivable and the inconceivable. To the unscientific mind, indeed, the difference between matter and spirit *is* that, but the really scientific mind knows perfectly well that it is absolutely ignorant as to the real nature and basis of matter. The science of the

present day has abundantly demonstrated its own ignorance, and confessed it, as to what even an atom really is. Besides, even in relation to the world of *sense*, it is confessedly true that the ideal world, or world of consciousness, is immeasurably more vital than what is usually called the world of matter.

At this very moment, it is the mind that controls the body: the gross is even now moved by the ethereal. Apart from the mysterious unit of vital power and volition, the whole body is a mere mass of inert matter. Spirit, or whatever we call that "unit of vital power and volition," vivifies and employs it.* And, even when certain schools of science refuse to include spirit among admissible realities, they have to admit that they confront absolutely insoluble problems in the phenomena of life, consciousness, and thought: they also admit that life, and consciousness, and thought, are more demonstrable than the existence of matter itself.

Mr. Huxley once bluntly said, to frightened

* Sir Isaac Newton was feeling after this subtle essence (which he called the *Divine Sensorium*) when he said:—"It is a very subtle spirit which penetrates through all things, even the hardest bodies, and is concealed in their substance. Through the strength and activity of this spirit bodies attract each other and adhere together when brought into contact. Through it electrical bodies operate at the remotest distance as well as near at hand, attracting and repelling."

religionists, aghast at the progress of materialism, "After all, what do we know of this terrible 'matter,' except as a name for the unknown and hypothetical cause of states of our own consciousness." I invite careful attention to those last words,—that what we call matter is only a name for an unknown "cause of states of our own consciousness." That is revolutionary in relation to the old materialistic assertion that the difference between matter and spirit is the difference between the known and the unknown, the conceivable and the inconceivable. It now turns out that states of mind are more real to us than states of matter, and that what we really know is not the actual condition of what affects us, but only how we are affected.

It was Mr. Huxley, too, who said:—" 'Matter' and 'Force' are, so far as we know, mere names for certain forms of consciousness. . . . Thus it is an undisputable truth that what we call the material world is only known to us under the forms of the ideal world; and, as Descartes tells us, our knowledge of the soul is more intimate and certain than our knowledge of the body." And that is the deliverance of Mr. Huxley, the terror of divines who do not comprehend him! But let me tell them that in this passage

we have a gleam of the unseen universe a thousand times more definite and hopeful than could be extracted from an avalanche of ordinary dogmatic or textual discourses on heaven and hell. It affirms that the inner world of consciousness is the only one we know at first hand,—that the external world is only an inference from our sensations. But our sensations are purely *mental*: they are, in fact, states of consciousness; and not one of them in any way resembles the object that excited it.

We are, then, at all events, *as* sure of the inner world of mind as we are of the outer world of matter: and both are inexplicable. We do not, however, in ordinary life, doubt the reality of matter because we have not the slightest idea of what the central, essential basis of an atom really is; neither should we doubt the reality of mind or spirit because we cannot conceive of a substance unlike that which we are familiar with as matter. Thought may be, and probably is, accompanied by some corresponding change or movement in the substance of the brain, but it does not follow that thought is produced or secreted by that change or movement, any more than that musical *ideas* are produced by the fingering of the keys of

an organ, though musical *sounds* may be. Changes and movements in the substance of the brain may be necessary for the manifestation of thought in a certain way, but it by no means follows that the thinker is necessarily dependent on such material conditions.

So obvious is this that even so cool a thinker, and so poor a "believer" as John Stuart Mill, saw and fully admitted it, and even went beyond it, in his *Essays*, in which he very forcibly said that "the relation of thought to a material brain is no metaphysical necessity, but simply a constant co-existence within the limits of observation:" and, he added, the uniform co-existence of one fact with another does not make the one fact a part of the other, or the same with it." "Experience," he says, "furnishes us with no example of any series of states of consciousness" without "a material brain," "but it is as easy to imagine such a series of states without, as with, this accompaniment, and we know of no reason in the nature of things against the possibility of its being thus disjoined." He even says, "We may suppose that the same thoughts, emotions, volitions, and even sensations which we have here, may persist or recommence somewhere else under

other conditions." This is all we ask, and this is perfectly scientific. Sensation, thought, and consciousness, are all in ourselves, and are absolutely unlike matter in all their peculiarities. In our present physical condition, sensation, thought, and consciousness, are excited by certain conditions or states of matter: but it is perfectly intelligible that we might exist under totally different conditions, and, by having a body adapted to altogether different surroundings, have precisely the sensations and thoughts we have now,—or even in an intenser form.

It thus appears that in relation to a world of thought and consciousness we have got hold of three solid facts;—that this world of thought and consciousness is at least as real to us as the world of matter; that it is in every way, in all its phenomena and results, utterly unlike the world of matter; and that its existence amid other conditions of exciting causes is perfectly reasonable and scientific. This is something gained,—almost enough to bring us within reach of that unseen universe which *is* the world of thought and consciousness.

Matter affects us, then; waves impinge on the senses; thought under physical limitations is accompanied by physical phenomena; that is

all we can say. For the rest, it looks as though the great realities, and the master of the fleshly house, were behind the veil; it looks as though an emancipation and not a destruction might come with the separation of our mental powers from fleshy control.

One of the greatest services rendered by modern science is its singularly vivid presentation of the fact that all our senses are extremely limited in their range,—a fact which is all important in our inquiry into the possibility of an unseen universe. It is a common and very natural mistake, that we see all there is to see, and hear all there is to hear. We have all our lives been accustomed to the five tiny windows through which all sensations come, and we inevitably fancy that they are adequate: but a very decided effort ought to be made to overcome the delusion,—very natural, I repeat, but very misleading,—that we now see and hear and touch all that there is to be seen, heard, and touched. Our five senses are all we have, and they measure only our poor range: they do not measure the boundless reaches of being, far, far beyond our ken. We can easily imagine that our senses might have been four instead of five—that the sense of smell, for instance, might have had

no existence. In that case, we should have had no conception of odour; and, though the subtile causes all existed around us as now, we should for ever have been oblivious of them. Why may it not be that the lack of some sixth sense is hiding from us some still more subtile reality? From everything that *grows* there are physical emanations, and, as our sense of smell is acute or dull, we perceive these as odours. Why may there not be from everything that *thinks* and *lives* mental and moral emanations? and why might there not be a sense that would detect and distinguish these? Nay, may not the rudiments of that sense be actually active in our unaccountable feelings and instincts of attraction and aversion? and why may we not conclude that it is this very sense which has made some sensitives "thought-readers" and "seers"? Here, again, we are on the very threshold of spirit-life; and the great suggestion is forced upon us, that when we get beyond the hidings of the body we shall develop mental, moral, and spiritual senses that will enable us to see and know one another in our inmost selves, and as we really are: and all that new and heightened life would be perfectly natural and not supernatural at all, however supersensuous it might be.

The greatest of all illusions, then, is the common illusion that we see, hear, and touch, all that might be visible, audible, and tangible. The truth is that we are all living on the outer rim of an unfathomable realm of existence, and that all our faculties are adjusted to that narrow range. Beyond that limit we feel and know that tremendous forces and a multitude of objects exist, of which we are able to perceive only a minute part.

When we look, from a little distance, at a bush of sweet brier, we see nothing between it and us, but we smell its fragrance; and if we reflect upon it we may be sure that all the distance between it and us must be pervaded by something which we call its odour. The probability is that if we could see that something, the million vibrating points of fragrance, like countless waves of coloured lights, would be even more delightful to the eye than is the odour to the nerves of smell. Or, watch a magnet at work. From a distance, or through some dense substance, it can attract a solid bar of iron. We can see nothing, but we are sure there *is* something between them: and if our eyes were keen enough we should probably see an aura with lines of flashing flame answering to the

lovely curves revealed when iron filings are dusted around the magnet. But all this is on the mere surface of our earthly globe, on which we creep like tiny creatures; and the thin veil of atmosphere folds us in, at once our preserver and our prison; and what there is in the infinite beyond we know not, only the more we know the more we see there is to know, and the more is the seen dwarfed in comparison with the unseen. What we call the solid globe itself is really a tremendous assemblage of atoms inconceivably small—so small that no eye can see, no instrument reveal them: and all these myriads of millions of atoms are not at rest, but in endless motion, so that the solidest granite rocks themselves are tremulous with ceaseless vibration at the very heart of every atom of them. What we call the vacant air is filled with light, and sound, and subtlest flashing forces flooding every tiniest space with music and ever flowing energy.*

* We are only just on the border-land of electrical forces; and yet what marvellous discoveries have been made! Of these, and of many other things, we might truly say, with Spenser in the *Faerie Queene*:—

“Yet all these were, when no man did them know,
Yet have from wisest ages hidden been :
And later times things more unknown shall show.
Why then should witless man so much misween
That nothing is but that which he hath seen ?”

It is of the greatest possible importance, then, to get a firm grasp of the fact that there are many grades of matter. It is a gross popular error that matter is something solid that we can see, and feel, and kick the foot against. Matter indeed is that, but it is many things besides, and extends, to begin with, all the way from granite to gas,—then to odours, and to Mr. Crookes' "radiant matter"—and no one knows whither.

It will help us immensely, if we accustom ourselves to feel the extreme limitations of all our faculties, just as we must feel our littleness when we contemplate the mighty worlds of space. Science, by teaching us the relative littleness of our planet, by proving to us that we are only one among many brethren, has enlarged the area of life, and immeasurably multiplied the possibilities of existence. It has made it almost necessary to believe that other worlds are inhabited, and it suggests that worlds in many respects very unlike our own have inhabitants also unlike ourselves, adapted to their world as we have been adapted to our world, through the working out, during countless ages, of the laws of development and the survival of the fittest. It is perfectly conceivable that the working out of these

natural laws may in other planets have developed races of creatures with organs of respiration, digestion, and assimilation which are practically spiritual or ethereal. It is only a question of environment. What has been done here on this globe has been done in harmony with natural law, adapting life to the world in which it is found: and it is in the highest degree scientific to infer that the same process has gone on elsewhere; in every case resulting in the evolution of life adapted to each particular globe. If that be so, the way is more than half constructed by which we may pass on to the realisation of the splendid truth that even now the spirit-part of man is developing powers that will enable it to survive the dissolution of the merely physical organism, and quite naturally pass away, to exist in an inner unseen universe adapted to it.

Illustrations of the homeliest kind will help us here.

Take sound, for instance. This is a phenomenon which is produced in us by a rhythmical and sufficiently rapid agitation of matter. This is the whole of it so far as the external *cause* of sound is concerned. But it is well known that there are material vibrations

that the ear cannot catch or translate. This has been shewn experimentally by means of the sensitive flame which can be made to dance and sing to sounds, or, rather, to waves of air so exquisite that our poor dull sense cannot perceive them. Thus it is literally true that if a sensitive flame had consciousness like ours, it would hear what we cannot hear, and surpass us as much in relation to the sense of hearing as some of the lower animals surpass us in their wonderful sense of smell.

The mystery of what we call "sound" is in itself a wonderful and utterly incomprehensible thing. Mr. Tyndall justly remarks that "the human mind cannot fathom" "how it is that the motion of the nervous matter" in the ear or brain can excite "consciousness of sound": for there is nothing corresponding to sound in what produces it: and though a whole park of artillery were discharged, the only result would be a disturbance of the atmosphere, and not sound at all unless an ear and a mind were present to catch the waves of motion and translate them into sound.

It is easy, then, to conceive of a universe of sound under entirely different conditions: and, to this, modern science bears witness, in

revealing the fact that we comprehend and occupy but a small space in the vast sphere of things flooded by and tremulous with ethereal and atmospheric conditions wherein the possibilities of sound are illimitable.

What is true of sound is as true of sight. We live in a world that is made luminous to us under certain conditions, and our sense of sight is the measure of our knowledge of objects, for the most part: but what Mr. Tyndall said of vibrations which the auditory nerves cannot catch, we may also say of objects that *vision* cannot perceive. "A beam of light," says Mr. Tyndall, "is a train of innumerable waves excited in and propagated through an almost infinitely attenuated and elastic medium, which fills all space and which we name the ether."

What Mr. Tyndall elsewhere calls "the luminiferous ether" may only be what we know as atmosphere in a more subtile state, but it is so attenuated and elastic that it can convey the vibrations answering to light at a rate of about 200,000 miles a second. Compared with that, we, in our ordinary atmosphere, may be said to be living in thick mud. What a suggestion have we here as to an unseen universe, ay! and as to exquisitely subtile

beings living their refined and happy life in it !

The other senses lead, in like manner, into the Unseen. There is, for instance, a great deal that is very suggestive about the sense of touch, which is the indicator of our relations to external things ; and a very poor and misleading indicator it is. We are absolutely certain that there are forms of matter that are to us quite invisible and intangible, and that these substances can pass through others that appear to us to be absolutely impenetrable. The gases, for instance, are as truly matter as the solid metals, and hydrogen is as much a substance as iron : and yet the one is solid to our touch, and the other is as nothing to that sense : and the gas can readily pass through the metal. It is only habit, and the limitation of our sense of touch, that lead us to think of matter in a certain subtile condition as less real than the denser substances : and, as the life-principle is itself something intensely subtile, it is quite conceivable that it might be united to matter in such a subtile condition that we, with our present gross sense of touch, would be utterly unable to come into contact with it ; nay, it is even scientifically conceivable that this exquisite living substance might be the organised body of a

conscious living man, and yet that, while it might itself be able to readily pass through the densest substances, it should be absolutely beyond apprehension by any of the dull crude senses at present at our command. Every object is to the hand what the hand is to it. A hand more sensitive would realise things in quite a different way. A hand is scientifically conceivable that should be subtle enough to pass through granite, and exquisite enough to feel the difference between oxygen and ozone.*

So again, with the sense of odour which is altogether in us, just as the sense of hearing is. There is nothing in what we call odour that is in any respect like odour. Odour does not exist, as such, till the vibrating particles that produce it reach and affect the nerves and brain of a conscious being.

It is true that it is the coarse *body* which receives the emanations or vibrations that excite the sense of odour; but it is not the coarse body that detects the meaning of them. It

* Mr. Tyndall may be cited as our guide here, in venturing beyond the confines of pure experience. He says that "in physics the experiential incessantly leads to the ultra-experiential;" that "out of experience there always grows something finer than mere experience." He adds the remarkable words: "The kingdom of science, then, cometh not by observation and experiment alone, but is completed by fixing the roots of observation and experiment in a region inaccessible to both, and in dealing with which we are forced to fall back upon the picturing power of the mind."

transmits them to some subtile vital centre, to some exquisite refined inner sense, and there the vibrations or emanations are translated into smell: and it is a question that may well be asked:—Why may not that subtile sense be as real and as independent as the subtile causes that affect it; and why may not a unity of such senses, *made* a unity by the consciousness of individuality, outlast and outlive the gross body, and exist independently in that universe of the Unseen to which they even now properly belong?

Always and everywhere, as though impelled by an intellectual, not to say a spiritual necessity, civilised and, to a very great extent, savage man has regarded the Unseen as the sphere of first causes and ultimate effects. When a man simply cringed before the spirit-people of that dread Unseen, or grovelled before the lords many and gods many of its awful regions, that happened which happens now, when the adoring soul lifts itself to the Great Father, or when the man of science finds in surrounding space the subtile forces by which all things live and move and have their being. In each case, the unseen universe was or is felt to contain the great secret of all being. The authors of that very remark.

able book, "The Unseen Universe," speak thus far the latest word of modern Science when they say: "We are compelled to imagine that what we see has originated in the Unseen. And we must resort to the Unseen not only for the origin of the *molecules* of the visible universe, but also for an explanation of the *forces* which animate these molecules. So that we are compelled to conclude that every motion of the visible universe is caused by the Unseen, and that its energy is ultimately carried again into the Unseen." Is not this wonderfully suggestive? All the sources and energetic causes of life come from the Unseen, and the energy thus produced goes back again into the Unseen. What if, as the splendid result, the intelligence, the personality, that are here grown and developed, pass into the Unseen with their glorious gains! The suggestion seems to be actually forced upon us, that man himself is only one of many wonderful products of the all diffused vital energy: but he is too feeble, too limited, too modern, to be anything but a trifling part of a stupendous whole; and all the world of matter as we know it is also too much like himself to be anything but one of the latest products of the mighty creative Power.

If, then, we have to look to the Unseen as the source and the ultimate receptacle of all energy, it certainly does seem a natural and inevitable inference that the unseen universe is the home of intelligence. It seems monstrous to assume that intelligence should only exist in connection with matter in its grossest forms, and that the world of first causes and ultimate effects should be the world of eternal darkness, death, and utter, hopeless solitude. Is it a rational conclusion that consciousness should only exist in connection with the dull brain of which we are cognisant?

Besides, it is here that the sublime laws of evolution, continuity of being, and the conservation of force, come in with their wonderful suggestions as to the persistence of life beyond the bounds and barriers of the Seen: so much so that it is almost forced upon us to infer the continuity of thought as well as of matter. It seems utterly unnatural to suppose that the lower should persist, and the higher fail and perish; that matter should be able to ebb into the Unseen and flow again into the Seen, and mind alone rise and fall on one solitary shore—begin and end on this tiny spot of earth. The inference, the longer we ponder it, becomes the more inevitable, that life and

thought, no less than matter, though they may know vast changes and pass into higher or more subtile forms of being, are destined to find their home in the vast Unseen. If, in the far dim past, some wise intelligence could have seen man in his early rudimentary condition, he would have seen in many a rough physical formation of the animal the first stages of a process of development that has now led on to the agile, clever, artistic *man*—would have seen the Raphael in the brute, the Shakspeare in the beast; and all that purely on the physical side. How much rather, then, shall we see in the Raphael and the Shakspeare, ay! and in the myriads of poor struggling, hoping, longing souls that have fought the battle of life and passed on, the rudiments of souls destined for the growths of immortality?

Here, then, we find our scientific basis of belief in spirit existence now and in an unseen universe. I do not at all profess that it is more than a *basis*, but I do think it is more than a theory or a hypothesis, grounded as it is on solid, though, as yet, little comprehended facts and laws. Spirit-existence is a fact here and now. Life and thought are orderly progressive products of natural law, and they

belong to the sphere of spirit. In considering the various grades of matter and of life, we come upon thought or consciousness in an orderly ascending scale. Force, matter, and instinct, though all equally wonderful and mysterious, are all below it. It is in thought and consciousness that we, for the first time, come to personality, and to that marvellous unity of life which binds into one supreme act of self-introspection or reasoning the complicated faculties of the human being. Here we have something altogether new, in the actual production of a conscious being—a unity of life and thought. By themselves, all the atoms that compose our physical being are dead: how then are consciousness and thought got out of them? As it has been elsewhere said:—"Your atoms are individually without sensation and intelligence. Take these, then—your dead hydrogen atoms, your dead oxygen atoms, your dead carbon atoms, your dead nitrogen atoms, your dead phosphorous atoms, and all other atoms of which the brain is composed—and, if you can, imagine how, from these, sensation, thought and emotion are to arise—how, from the physical tremors of uniting atoms, things so utterly incongruous can come." Consciousness and thought, then,

are not even a property of life: they are something utterly fresh, and unlike everything else known to us. How can we help regarding them, then, as a farther stage of being, or higher reach in the marvellous march of progressive life?

In conscious man we seem to see life itself attaining a new and most important gain. In the plants and the lower animals it exists only as the unseen force that differentiates them from inert or inorganic matter; but in man we see it under a new and most significant development. In his case there is not only vital energy, enabling matter to live and grow, but vital energy, individualised and become, one might say, self-conscious. We see vital energy in a condition of self-possession and practical independence—a unity in multiplicity—in fact, grown to personality. This I call a supreme fact in the development of life, seeing that it is no other than the growth of man, in the scale of being from protoplasm to personality.

Here, then, we come to what we call spirit-existence *now*. The spirit is that unity of consciousness and thought which vivifies and uses the various functions of the body; the unity of consciousness and thought which persists

amid all the changes that happen to the body, and even amid its total renewals from time to time; the unity of consciousness and thought which, just because it has attained vital or spiritual personality, will, we are entitled to say, survive the dropping of the physical structure, and find itself at home in the unseen universe beyond. If this were not so, we should have to contemplate an orderly and splendid process of development broken upon its attainment, and ending nowhere: nay! we should have to contemplate the lower persisting and passing on, and the higher failing in the very hour of its consummation. We have to follow matter into the ethereal regions of its more subtile modes of existence; and shall we not follow mind also into those unseen regions, especially when we see that matter everywhere seems to be manipulated and directed by mind?

Thus we may reasonably conclude that the ultimate production of conscious spirit-personality is only the highest stage, on this plane of being, of the well-known process of evolution; and it is perfectly in accordance with that process, and with the great law underlying it, to trace that spirit-personality into a higher and more appropriate sphere of existence, and

to find in the unseen universe both its first cause and its final home. Assuredly we have here all the conditions of a state of being inconceivably superior to any known to us here. Imagine the life-principle united to a spiritual body as subtle and exquisite as itself, and having its sphere of activity in a world perfectly adapted to its own sensitive, ethereal form of existence; surely we should there have everything that could give the most thrilling realisation of life, with all its possibilities of progress and delight. Here, "in the body pent," we know everything only through the dusky veil of the flesh, and that hides a thousand times more than it reveals; but what will it be to pass behind the veil with our growth of spirit-personality; to know everything immediately; to hear, to see, to touch, at first hand, and without the veil between; to have the spirit-self to one's-self, without earthly tabernacle to imprison it?*

* The ancient Egyptians, wise in so many things, seem to have perceived the truth here. In the life of Samuel Sharpe, the following reference is made to a mummy (of an Egyptian priest) that was examined at the Royal Institution, in 1836: "One of the pictures on the outer case represents the blue vault of heaven, in the shape of the Goddess Neith bending over and touching the ground with her arms. Under this vault is the deceased priest, with the two bodies into which death divides him. His earthly body is red, and is falling; his heavenly or spiritual body is blue and stands erect, raising its hands to heaven. This is a pictorial representation of the idea expressed many centuries later by St. Paul, "There is a natural body and there is a spiritual body." (1 Cor. xv., 44.)

Shakspeare finely makes Lorenzo say of the harmony even now "in immortal souls," that we cannot hear it because "this muddy vesture of decay doth grossly close it in;" and, time out of mind, the finest, rarest, noblest men and women have thus discoursed of the inner self.

And now, but one thought more—to every one a thought full of consolation. All God's universe is beautiful with the law of progress: and all things move on to the music of His own heavenly will. Death, therefore, is advancement. What may it not be to the weary and heavy-laden who have all their life long dragged a maimed or poisoned body along, who might have cried out with Paul, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me out of this body of death?" What may it not be to millions of us who have always been forced to think of our weaknesses and our liability to exhaustion, who have been painfully conscious of our slowness of thought, our feebleness of will, our easily besetting sin? All these hindrances are probably physical, and, if so, will disappear when the kindly earth receives the body that will be needed never, never more. What may it not be to those of us who have sent our oldest friends on before—

to those of us, the light of whose eyes has been taken beyond the veil? It may be the emancipation from all that dimmed the vision and oppressed the heart; it may be the discovery that heaven and earth are not far apart but near, and that the very beings we thought we had lost had all along been preparing our place for us, even as Jesus said it would be with him; it may be—nay, but it *will* be, it *is*, the passing out of our darkness into God's marvellous light.

CHAPTER IV.

MAN'S DESTINY IN A FUTURE LIFE.

I—MAN'S DESTINY IN A FUTURE LIFE CON- SIDERED IN THE LIGHT OF THE PERFEC- TIONS OF GOD.

Having considered, in general, the grounds of belief in a future life, we may now pass on to specifically consider what may be rightly regarded as the subject of absorbing practical interest for every human being. The question is no longer, "If a man die, shall he live again?" but, 'If a man live again, under what conditions and for what ends may he hope to live?' To this question we now turn; and if, occasionally, we have to go over again a little of the ground already trodden, it will only be to ask with emphasis the question only held in abeyance until now.

And first, we consider this question in the light of the perfections of God. We are often told that it is our duty to love God, but we cannot love at will: we can only love the

just, the beautiful, and the good,—unless, indeed, we enter into the region of pity and sympathy, where we *can* love the unlovely. But our love of God cannot be the love of pity; it can only be the love of gratitude and confidence, and delight. We are often told, however, that we have no right to judge God, and that all we have to do is to receive what God says. But that is exactly what we want to do; and we are so anxious about that, that we are very careful to guard against all error and deception. If I am told, for instance, that God sends all unbaptised babies to hell, I deny it. Why? Because I judge that the just and good God would not do it. It seems to me that we are bound to judge of what God is likely to do; and it ought to be carefully observed that when we deny anything that seems to attribute cruelty or injustice to God we are not “murmuring” against Him, as some say, but only trying to vindicate Him. We are really making a stand for God’s honour, and it is useless to tell us that we have no right to judge of what is worthy of God. We must judge; we do judge; and only when we see His infinite and glorious perfections can we really trust and love Him.

In bringing, then, this inquiry into man’s

destiny in a future life to the test of the perfections of God, I shall refer to the seven great conceptions of God which, I think, cover the whole ground of our belief concerning Him. He is the Almighty; He is the All Holy; He is the All Just; He is the All Merciful; He is the Ever Blessed; He is the Universal King; He is the Universal Father. In the light of every one of these thoughts of God it is easy to come to the conclusion that they whom God loves, and in whose obedient and trusting spirits He has implanted the longing for continued life, will pass into the world of light beyond the grave, to find that their hope has not been in vain. The Almighty will guard them; the All Holy will not consent to lose them; the All Just will not let their trust be put to shame; the All Merciful will save them; the Ever Blessed will rejoice over them; the King of heaven will welcome them as His obedient subjects; the Father will take them home. These things are believed by all who believe in the Christian faith at all. It is when we think of the "lost" that we part company; and it is the destiny of these, therefore, that I propose to consider now.

God, then, is *almighty*. We must begin with this: for we need the power of God as

a base, on which all our trust is to be built. What would it avail to shew that He is just and merciful, nay! to shew that He is the Universal Father, if we could not believe in His power? And here, of course, I must take the omnipotence of God for granted. I am reasoning out this question now with those who believe in God, and presume they will grant that God has the power to carry out His purposes. If so, He must have power to put an end to all misery and sin. Whether He ought to do it is another question; whether He will do it is another question: all we are considering now is whether He has the power: and, believing that this will, as a matter of course, be granted, I pass on to consider the subject in the light of God as *all holy*. By *all holy* I mean the love of all good for others and the possession of all good for Himself: and by good I mean moral and spiritual purity. Here, then, we come to the second step in the inquiry. We have agreed upon the power, and now we can, I think, agree upon the will. An eternal hell means eternal sin; and everlasting torment means everlasting blasphemy. Now "orthodoxy" teaches us, not that hell exists apart from God, not that God is absent from hell either

as ruler or spectator, but that hell is as much God's as heaven; that He is the Tormentor; that He is the Being who prevents men escaping from hell; that He is the Being who refuses to give any one of the lost another chance; that He is the Being who shuts the gate and hinders all return; that He is the Being who will not listen to prayer, but compels lost souls to be sinners, and tormented sinners, for ever. I say that is as opposed to the idea of God as all holy as one thing can be opposed to another. God, if He is all holy, must desire to see sin come to an end; He must desire to see the sinner learning, from bitter experience, the error of his ways; and yet we are told that it is He who will for ever, not only permit, but actually secure the never-ending existence of sin. If any good man knew of but one house in the place where he dwelt that was a little hell in itself, where men and women blasphemed God, and spent their time in making every one in the house miserable and wicked, would he not long to do something to put an end to that misery and horror. And if he had any authority in that place, would he not move for the sweeping away of that den of infamy, as a moral pest-house? Or if he

owned the house would he not rather burn it to the ground than endure the sight of it as such an earthly hell? But, in any case, would he, could he, hear the screams of the inmates for mercy and help, and only reply by pitiless silence, and by preventing their escape? If he could act such a part he would be a devil and no man. And yet they tell us that the all holy and almighty God will actually work an eternal miracle to keep in existence an eternal hell for millions, and will in no wise suffer even one to escape from it, even though escape be sought with tears of repentance, and the cries that come from anguished hearts. To tell me that, and yet to tell me that God is a holy God who must desire to see all sin come to an end is like telling me that the filth of a city lane is as pure and white as the snow that has new-fallen on Ben Lomond, or that there is no difference between an angel and a fiend. So far, then, from believing that God will devote Himself to devising punishments and tortures for His lost children, I maintain that He will seek them, and save them from misery and sin; and, so far from rejecting their prayers and preventing their return, He will, as the All Holy and the Almighty, come to the rescue of every

poor soul that seeks Him. If this is not true, then He is imperfect: and, if imperfect, He is not God.

The third conception of God is that He is *all just*. And, by *all just*, I mean simply that He does, and will for ever do, what is equitable and right: and, in ascertaining what is equitable and right, we shall only honour God and do our duty by using the faculties He has given us. And I would say here that we must give up language altogether if we are to have two sets of ideas when we use such a word as "justice." Justice must be justice everywhere and for all: and what is just for God to do is not and cannot be unjust for man to do. It is, moreover, not an act of faith, it is a frightful prostitution of our moral faculties if we call that just in God which we feel to be radically wrong. It was John Stuart Mill who said:—If I am to be sent to hell for refusing to call that just which I see to be unjust, to hell I will go. There was real reverence and true piety in that. It is necessarily and plainly unjust that any man should be punished and tortured for ever for the sins or misbeliefs of earth. When we plead for the mercy of God, we are often told that we must remember God is just as

well as merciful. As though justice and mercy were opposed! But justice is simply equity, and is not at all necessarily connected with the harsh exaction of penalty. What "orthodox" calls justice is really revenge; for the justice that is said to reign in hell could only be the unending fury of an implacable and indiscriminating vengeance. We ask for justice then. We take our stand on justice: and, in doing so, protest that no wretch who ever stumbled from earth to hell ever deserved eternal torment there. But what shall we say of the heedless youth, half-blinded with new-born passions, and badly-educated,—damned for what was scarcely any fault of his own? What shall we say of the heretic, sent to hell after an agony of search for truth on earth? What shall we say of the poor child born amid dirt and destitution and misery, who grew up ignorant, toil-worn, and debased? Why, heaven itself would rise in mutiny, and cry out against its King if these things were true.

But God hates sin, it is said, and therefore will punish it for ever. No, I reply, He hates sin, and so He will put an end to it for ever. But, it is said again, He is just in punishing sin with infinite punishment, because the sin, being committed against an infinite Being,

becomes infinite sin. Well then, if fifty years of sinning against an infinite Being becomes infinite sin, perhaps fifty years of punishment from an infinite Being will be an infinite punishment; and so, even in that sense, justice may be done.

But we are sometimes told that evil and misery exist here, and that, therefore, it may exist hereafter, and yet God be just. But there is all the difference in the world between misery permitted and torture inflicted; and again there is all the difference in the world between misery existing for a time and torment enduring for ever. The one may be just and even useful, but the other could only be evil and malignant. The doctrine is therefore inconsistent with the justice of God.

And now we may pass on to consider the question in the light of the fact that God is *all merciful*. Mercy, I have said, in its truest sense, *is* justice, but it may perhaps be well to consider mercy by itself, as goodness, kindness, or benevolence. And we know well that here, if the Bible is to be of any use to us, we can give no higher and truer name to God than that He is *Love*. He is not only loving, as a quality, but He is Love itself. At all hazards we must cleave to this. God is Love. Whatever is doubtful, that is clear. God loves

me : that is what I have got to hold by. He will never let me go, and will never change : that is my hope and stay. I may forget Him, misunderstand Him, yea ! even rebel against Him, but He will never hate me, He will never cease to love me ; for He is the unchanging God. He will seek me until He finds me, and He loves me too well to lose me. Everyone of God's children may say that. But, though "orthodoxy" is willing enough to admit that God is merciful here, it hastens to deny that He will be merciful hereafter : and yet, why should He not be ? What makes the difference, whether here or there ? Surely God is the same ! No, they say ; the God who here was gracious, and pitiful, and ready to forgive, is there eternally unforgiving, eternally hard,—hard as the rock and inexorable as death ! Who can really believe it ? Who has a right to limit the mighty and undying love of God ? If I cannot trust that love, what have I to trust to ? If I must give up this, I have nothing left me but a fickle, frail, uncertain Deity, whose love is only like a passing dream. To attribute to God, then, the infliction of eternal torment is to mar for us the perfection of His goodness, is to make it impossible for us to be sure

of His love; for an eternal hell such as "orthodoxy" describes, could not exist in the same universe with an eternal and an omnipotent God. God, we have agreed, is all powerful; now we affirm that He is all merciful: and it is the union of these two conceptions that will one day destroy all belief in the torments of an eternal hell. I am but *imperfectly* good, but I should hate myself if I caught myself in the act of even entertaining the idea of inflicting needless pain on a fellow creature: or, if I imagined I could bring myself to use the power, if I had it, of torturing my worst enemy for a whole year, I should think my moral nature was rotting, and that I was turning into a fiend. But what would that be to the tormenting of millions in a hopeless eternal hell? No; if God can make nothing good of the lost, He will surely be merciful enough to put them out of their misery. To say that He will keep them in being when no chance of their amendment remains, to say that He will torture them for ever, only to gratify something in Himself, is to make Him not a God to be loved and served, but a Satan to be hated and defied. But God will, surely, prove to be better and kinder than ever any of us

have imagined Him to be.

“The Night is mother of the Day,
The Winter of the Spring,
And ever upon old decay
The greenest mosses cling.
Behind the cloud the starlight lurks,
Through showers the sunbeams fall;
And God who loveth all His works,
Hath left His hope with all.”

Of God as *ever blessed* little need be said. I will only quote a few words from the work of a teacher of religion who, a little while ago, fought his way out of the “orthodox” doctrine, gave it up, and is now preaching the justice and the love of God. “The love of God is universal. Absolutely holy, and infinitely superior to the possibility of being affected by the ills to which His creatures are liable, He is also The Perfectly Happy. It may be presumed that these positions will not be disputed. But how do they accord with the endless misery of His creatures? However wicked they may be, they are the work of His hands, and so far good, and worthy of His complacency; the wretchedness consequent on their wickedness secures to them His compassion also. Here then are intelligences, the objects of the love of God, because He is unchanging, ever loved by Him, loved by Him as certainly, though sinners, as they would

have been if they had never fallen. And they are not only supremely wretched, but destined to remain so throughout the immortality of which He has constituted them the possessors. And He is still The Infinitely Happy!" "All God's works praise Him, and for them all it becomes His saints to do so too. But for the creation of rational beings, of whom it was foreknown that their history would be one of intensest wickedness and woe, and that throughout all eternity, how is it possible that they should intelligently and conscientiously praise Him?" No; the ever blessed God will not be the eternal Tormentor of His children. Happy in Himself, He will not provide for the wretchedness of others; and the praises of heaven will not for ever be marred by the blasphemies and shrieks of hell.

The next conception we have of God is that of the *Universal King*. This is involved in the idea of His omnipotence. Whatever He may allow for a time, the words of the Apostle must sometime come true,—that God shall be "all in all." But how can God be "all in all" while Satan reigns in hell, and evil shares the Universe with good? How can He be "all in all" until His will is done by all? It is well known that some of the ancient

fathers of the Christian church faced the question fairly, and confessed and gloried in the confession that wickedness would come to an end, and God's reign be universal at last: and I see not how the conclusion can be avoided, unless we give up the idea of God as Universal King. One of these fathers, only 300 years after Christ, said—"It will only be true of God that He is in all things, when no evil shall exist. For it is not to be supposed that God can be in evil. So that either he will not be in all things, or it is demonstrated that nothing will be evil. For it is not possible for God to be in evil." It is true He permits evil now, but this does not touch the fact of His ultimately universal reign. But the existence of everlasting sin and never-ending enmity to Him would proclaim Him anything but Universal King.

It has been well said that "The glory of an earthly government is, that all its subjects shall be virtuous, happy, and contented. Some great crisis in the history of a nation may prevent this for a certain amount of time; peculiar circumstances, against which its people have to fight, may intervene, and hinder that prosperity which else would be theirs; but that constant and unmitigated misery and

disorder, . . . and that rebellion should ever be rife, is a sufficient proof that that government is not answering the purpose of its existence, and that it is time for its disgraceful power to come to an end. And yet that which is the disgrace of earthly governments is said to be an honour to the Sovereign who has all the resources of the universe at His command." But our King will triumph, not in the eternal torturing of His enemies, but in the eternal love and service of His friends.

And now, finally, one thought as to the idea of God as *Universal Father*. The very idea of fatherhood and everything connected with it make the idea of eternal torment odious and hateful. And yet if God is not our Father, what is He? If we may not think of ourselves as His children, what are we? And if we may think of Him as our Father, how dare men bid us look for unfatherly treatment at His hands? Where is the man who would give his child an hour's pain except for its good? The worst of men would hardly do it. How, then, can we believe that the Heavenly Father will torture millions of His children for ever, without any object, but to satisfy Himself? For let us remember, if

punishment is to be eternal, it cannot answer any purpose for the good of those who endure it. The eternity of it makes it useless and purposeless. Who would be responsible for that? Not one of us. How dare anyone then, lay it to the charge of God? If, in the days when I looked into the face of an earthly father and trusted him, it had been told me that, while he was loving and blessing me, he was tormenting, in some deep dungeon, brethren I had never seen; and if papers to prove it had been laid before my eyes, I should have laughed the impudent documents to scorn, and taken refuge in my confidence that my father was good and true—I should have trusted him against the world. And shall I do less now for God? If need be, I can give up the words of the book and the assertions of the creeds, but I cannot, I will not, I dare not give up the only thing I know is true,—I dare not give up my God. He is almighty, and he can make his will triumphant: He is all holy, and He desires to overcome all impurity and sin: He is all just, and to the meanest of His creatures He will neither be cruel nor unkind: He is all merciful, and will manifest His goodness for ever and to all: He is ever blessed, and the

bliss He has He will delight to share: He is to be the Universal King, and He must be all in all: He is the Universal Father, and we may safely trust Him with the world.

This consideration of man's destiny in a future life has been here made to turn upon the probability or possibility of endless misery or endless punishment for any, because if we once come to a conclusion on that subject all else is immediately clear. If sin and misery and punishment are not necessarily endless, then the door of hope for all is opened; and that at once suggests the only alternative, —a life of progress for all beyond the grave, —a life of natural and orderly development under conditions infinitely more likely to secure advance in knowledge and goodness than any that could ever fall to our lot on earth: and this is the only view of the destiny of man in a future life which is really consistent with faith in the perfections of an almighty, holy, just, merciful, and ever-blessed Father-God.

2—THE APPEAL TO JESUS.

Many difficulties beset us in any attempt to ascertain the ideas of Jesus concerning a future

life. What we want to know is—what Jesus himself thought and said concerning the future life: and what we have to help us is only what certain writers or compilers have made him say. Or, if that is stating our predicament too hopelessly, it will suffice to say that what we have to help us is certain reported sayings of his for which we have to depend upon writers who are, to us, practically unknown. Besides, our four little memoirs of Jesus are of a nature sadly too limited, and his discourses are far too fragmentary, to furnish us with any very complete idea as to what his ordinary teaching was. Removed from him and his circumstances, as we are, by the 1800 years that lie between us and him, I think every one who reflects upon it must feel that what we have by way of authentic testimony is of a kind that will warrant no one in making any very positive statements, and that make it even absurd for any one to attempt to draw up a system out of the few fragments that are in our hands. Another difficulty besets us here. Jesus was a Jew: he was born and bred amid the traditions, the habits, and the teachings of one of the most strongly marked peoples of the ancient world: he was evidently an attentive listener,

an earnest inquirer, and a receptive reader; and he naturally used the language of the time, and worked from the standpoint he found made ready for him, adopting and adapting the ideas, the hopes, and the aspirations, of his time. It is important, then, to observe the relation in which Jesus stood to the age in which he lived, the teachers into whose midst he was born, and the peculiarities of the faith in which he was doubtless taught. To omit this inquiry altogether, and to treat Jesus as a miraculous being, having no dependence upon and no relation to his age and his country, is to throw an air of unreality over all his life, and to make him practically unrelated to the history of mankind.

In quoting, then, any recorded saying of his, and founding either a doctrine or an argument upon it, we ought first to pause and ask three things: 1st—Does this, so far as we can ascertain, give us what Jesus really said? 2nd—Is it likely or probable that this was characteristic of his general teaching? and 3rd—To what extent is this a mere provincialism, either as it fell from his own lips or as it has become narrowed by his biographer? I do not think it possible to come to just conclusions, unless we thread our way through the gospels with

some such questions as these on our lips.

There are a set of passages which represent Jesus as sharing the idea that in the future life persons of a certain character will suffer the actual tortures of hell fire: in which passages he seems to go but little, if at all, beyond the men of his time who had inherited the darker beliefs of Egypt and Persia. But it is quite possible that he gave to such phrases as I allude to a meaning which his hearers and even his biographers failed to catch, and that when he talked of Hades and Gehenna he only used the emphatic language of his time, as a vehicle of truths which needed such help to carry them home to the consciences and hearts of those who heard him. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus strikingly reminds us of the Greek idea of the Elysian fields and Tartarus in the same realm, only divided by an impassable gulf. That parable might have been told in Greece, and would have been in harmony with many a poem and legend there. The picture of the great division at the last day, when the good are put on the right hand and the bad on the left, might also be paralleled in the ancient writings of many of the peoples of the oriental world. But it is by no means certain

that Jesus uttered these parables as they stand, or that, if he uttered them, he meant them to stand for literal representations of actual facts. In truth, he may only have done what many a prophet had done before him, in using the language of magnificent hyperbole to set forth moral and spiritual ideas. It is quite possible that the biographer misunderstood Jesus, and that he (in company with most if not all of the early Christians) expected an actual summoning of the world to judgment, and an awful winding up of the affairs of all mankind. If Jesus shared these expectations and really taught them, let us frankly confess that he also was mistaken; and then pass on to estimate the value of such ideas as he has left us for our encouragement and our help in our endeavours to find the way to that high world in which he, at all events, so firmly and faithfully believed.

Putting aside, then, as not quite belonging to this investigation, the record of his sayings concerning the details of the future judgment, and also passing by such of his utterances as are plainly coloured with the beliefs of his time, let us get as near as we can to what seems his own,—to his pure, spiritual, and original nature, to find there such help as

he can legitimately give us, and such as we can truly and usefully receive.

And the first thing that will strike a patient and unprejudiced observer is, that, although Jesus is always described as the bringer of life to men, and of the knowledge of immortality to the world, yet we have not one discourse of his on the subject. Scattered sayings, utterances by the way, we have: but these are only few and far between, and are often as obscure as they are fragmentary. I do not say this by way of depreciation. I only point to a fact. The wonderful thing is, that, with words so few, he has given us thoughts so numerous; and that, with utterances so broken, he has given us hopes so glorious. The secret of this is not far to seek, and we shall look for it presently.

The central idea he seemed to have concerning the soul was a very simple one. He never argued for it, but always assumed that man is a spirit, that the spring of eternal life is in the soul, and that all a man needs is to have that spring opened, and his eyes directed to it. Hence, he spoke so much of giving men "life," of delivering them from "death," of passing from death unto life, of being in men's souls a well of water springing

up into everlasting life. Hence, again, he spoke of the kingdom of God, or the kingdom of heaven, as something within a man. This was, probably, a frequent if not an entirely original idea with him. He assumed, I say, that man was a living soul; and the whole question of salvation was, to him, narrowed to the question of the birth of the soul, in becoming self-conscious, and in its entrance, thoughtfully, heartily, and lovingly, into the kingdom of God now. He startled men by calling them into that kingdom, and then turning round with the assertion that that kingdom was within them. But once come to the central idea, out of which all this grew, that man is a spiritual being and God's child, and at once all will be plain; and it will be seen that to enter the kingdom of heaven is to let that kingdom enter into us.

But, beyond this, Jesus evidently cherished and taught a very distinct faith in a heaven beyond earth, and a life beyond the grave. And yet here also there is no argument, and very little of formal statement; but, in place of these, we have the most charming taking for granted that what he says is indisputable. He seems to be unconscious of death: he hardly deigns to notice the grave: one almost

expects to hear him say that it is quite possible for men to go away and return as often as they please. He talks of his Father, as though he had only just come from home, and of heaven as though it was his native place. This is the secret of which I spoke just now, and which gives to his simplest utterances so wonderful a charm. He does not seem to aim at convincing us: what he does is to take us by the hand, as a wise strong brother might, and gently lead us on. "I go," he said, to his disciples, "I go to prepare a place for you: and I will come again and receive you unto myself." If they could once believe that, what a world of terror and doubt would disappear; and how would the rough road be strewn with flowers! "In my Father's house," he says, "there are many mansions: I go to prepare a place for you." Few and simple words! but rich with what infinite meanings! The universe is our Father's "house:" what an idea that gives us of its blessed arrangements,—that it is prepared for all God's children,—its "many mansions" prepared for their many needs! But, besides the graciousness of this conception, how true it is to all we know of the working of God's laws,—that like ever gravitates to like, and that all worlds and their inhabitants correspond! It is

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at once the wisest, the simplest, the profoundest, the most religious, and the most rational idea of the universe and of the allotments of the future that mankind ever conceived.

And, in like manner, what a marvellous glimpse we get into the pursuits, the habits, the ideas, and the delights of the heavenly world, by that one saying—"There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth!" It may or may not be true; but what an amazing idea it is; and what a wide realm of light it opens to our view! It makes heaven not far off but near; it links us, our sorrows and our sins, our joys and our virtues, with the contemplations, the pursuits, and the joys of angels; it dispels the thought that we are left here to struggle on alone, and that heaven is a world of selfish enjoyment, where happy souls trouble themselves no more about the pilgrims they have left behind; it makes the redemption of mankind from misery and sin one of the conditions of the perfect bliss of heaven.

What a remarkable idea of the heavenly world, again, is suggested by that one saying concerning children, that "of such is the kingdom of heaven," or that "their angels do always behold the face of the Father who is in

heaven!" How utterly unlike every idea of the heavenly world we find elsewhere! The monstrous, the unutterably splendid, disappear; and, in the light of these few simple words, we see a heaven of love and tenderness: for a heaven that finds special room for children must be the abode of the pure, the beautiful, and the good.

How significant, too, is that concluding scene of the great parable or drama of the last judgment, when the reason is given for the welcome of the accepted and the banishment of the rejected!—if, indeed, these were really the words of Jesus, "I was hungry, and ye fed me: I was thirsty, and ye gave me to drink: I was a stranger, and ye welcomed me: I was naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me." These are the grounds for saying to the accepted—"Come, ye blessed of my Father." What a rebuke to the creeds which count these works of mercy as nothing, and which base the hope of eternal life on the reception of a form of words!

Heaven, then, with Jesus, is the same as peace, love, purity, and joy; and all else is the darkness of Hades and the horror of Gehenna. He himself seemed to trust more

than he knew, and to content himself not so much with knowledge of detail as with implicit confidence in the Father. In that he rested, as one who reposes on something deeper even than faith. With his hand in the hand of the Father, he went into the dark valley; and if, for a moment, the thick darkness and the agony blinded his eyes, it was only for a moment: and that bitter cry, "My God! why hast thou forsaken me?" ended in the peaceful whisper, "My Father! into Thy hands I commit my spirit." He knew nothing of death; all was life. His God was not the God of the dead but of the living, for all lived to Him. He went away, he said, only to come again. He would go to prepare a place for the poor strugglers he left behind: and he would return to them, and receive them unto himself, that where he was they might be too.

Passing on from the thoughts of Jesus, in relation to the general question of a future life, we may now specifically ask what light his personality and teachings throw upon the solemn question of the *destiny* of man in that life; and especially upon the destiny of those who are called "the lost." And here, again, we shall have to remember that we can never hear him except in echoes. The gospels are

not absolutely clear or consistent, and it may easily happen that some doubtful things will have to be brought to the light of the less obscure. We shall have to judge broadly and generously; to take in all the view, and reckon it the worst thing we can do, to fasten on a few texts and make the whole case depend upon them. We shall consider, then, four points:—the character, the office, the life, and the teachings of Jesus: and the case will not be fairly stated or fully understood unless we admit all these into our view. We must ask four questions:—What was Jesus like? What did he come for? What did he do? and, What did he say?

We need not dwell long on the first of these. It will be admitted that, on the whole, the view we get of Jesus in the gospels is one that only excites our reverence and our love. It will also be conceded that if any characteristics prevail over others these are the characteristics of tender care for the weary, gentle compassion for the despairing, and brotherly love for the sinful. I do not think I am "picking and choosing texts" when I say that. I am not, in fact, quoting texts at all. I do not want to quote texts: it would be like insulting Jesus to do it. It would be

like proving that the sun shines on a glorious May day, by bringing into the house a handful of buttercups and daisies. Go to the window for yourself, and look out upon the meadows, the mountains, and the trees. So with the character of Jesus. Even making all allowances for little textual spots on this sun, I suppose I may take for granted that pity, gentleness, simplicity, love, care, and compassion for all kinds of misery, sin, and want, distinguish and really mark out the character of Jesus. So strongly marked are these characteristics in him, so bright and beautiful is the pure benevolence that was the inspiration of his life and the charm of his character, that we are positively startled and almost shocked at his treatment of the Syro-Phenician woman—the only instance of apparent want of gentleness and love for the poor and the sorrowful—and we are only relieved and re-assured when the sequel shews us that his heart meant the blessing all the while, and when, for his seeming unkindness, he sent her away with redoubled blessing. We cannot imagine Jesus deliberately choosing to pass by unrelieved misery and unpardoned sin; and when the book tells us that he went about doing good, and that he came to seek and to save that which was lost, we feel

this to be simply and literally true. Now, transport that gentle, pure, and loving being into the spirit-world;—a world divided, they tell us, as this is divided, into abodes of bliss and horror, into the habitations of holiness and sin: imagine that being, if you can, shutting himself up with his friends, to enjoy the rest, the brightness, and the beauty of heaven, in the full knowledge, perhaps in full sight, of the fact that millions of his brothers and sisters are in hell: imagine that being contenting himself through all eternity with that state of things, and making no effort to repeat in hell the blessed work he achieved on earth. Can we imagine that? I cannot. It would be like imagining that a fond mother could bear with calmness to see her darling the prey of howling wolves; it would be like imagining Howard amusing himself with hearing the clanking of prisoners' chains, or Clarkson delighting himself with the sight of fettered slaves, or Florence Nightingale being content to see men die, miserable and mad. I have nothing to do here, at present, with what men call Revelation. All I am now concerned with is the character of Jesus, as we know it: and I say it is simply impossible to think and speak together of that character and of eternal

and unrelieved torments. To go farther and to say that the gentle and loving being we call Jesus will be and is the very God who Himself will torment millions of lost souls for ever, is to use language so monstrous that I can only suppose habit prevents it being regarded as almost blasphemous and insane.

Thus far, then, as to the character of Jesus. In the next place, consider his *office*. And here, once again, I think I shall have the sympathy of all professing christians when I say that the special office of Jesus is to reveal the mind and heart of God. I am not only willing to accept that statement, I am anxious to make it. I know of no higher office, and I desire to give to Jesus the very highest. All God's works reveal Him; but most of all does man reveal Him: and, amongst men, there is no revelation of God like the revelation of God in the man Jesus. I accept, therefore, in all its fulness and depth of meaning, that great saying of his—"He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." I believe that, and because I believe it I do not believe that God our Father will torment lost souls for ever. We are told, by a very high authority, that God is love: and surely, if Jesus revealed God in anything, he revealed

Him in that. He himself tells us that he did not come into the world to condemn it but to save it, and that God so loved us as to send him. I will not refer here to the actions of Jesus, because I shall have to do this presently, in speaking of his life; all I have now to do is to point out that the office of Jesus, as the revealer of the love of God, as the revealer of the purpose of God, is an office that is utterly incompatible with the idea of eternal pitilessness and implacable vengeance. If it is true that God is such a tormentor of souls, if it is true that He will be such a tormentor for ever, then we have no revelation of God in that aspect of Him and a being very different from Jesus must come to set Him forth: for Jesus is the revealer of a being who is ever saying to His sorrowful children—"Come unto me, and I will give you rest."

We may now naturally proceed to consider the question in the light of the *life* of Jesus: and, as I have intimated, by the life of Jesus I mean the deeds or actions of Jesus, so far as we know anything about them from the Gospels. Of course, for the purposes of this argument, I take it for granted that the Gospels give us, on the whole, a faithful representation

of the active life of Jesus. I believe they do: and I shall again be, I think, in harmony with all christian people when I say that the actions of Jesus were universally and uninterruptedly gracious, merciful, and benevolent. Judging him from his actions, Jesus harboured no thought that was not a thought of unselfish love: he put no bounds to his mercy, he set no limits to his pity. There is no sign anywhere that he could possibly stand by and not interfere to save the lost: so much so that, if it was really God who sent him to live his beautiful life here, the idea of God being eternally implacable to any of His creatures is monstrous and an unendurable contradiction.

But let us take the incidents in his life that are specially looked upon both as credentials and revelations: I mean the miracles. It does not matter here whether we believe in the miracles or not; for, whether "supernatural" works of wonder, or incidents that only indicate the character of his actions, they, in either case, have a vital connection with the question we are considering: for what, in their essence, are these miracles? Displays of power? startling representations of occult and hidden things? No: they are, essentially acts of healing, wonderful acts of kindness,—shewn not to

angels in heaven or kings upon earth, but to poor beggars by the wayside, to forgotten old people who came with the crowd, to wretched maniacs, and loathed lepers. I do not deny these acts of healing. I am particularly anxious that "orthodox" believers should really believe them. They were, they say, Christ's credentials and they are parts of Christ's self-revelation. So let them be considered. Tell me, then, what happened to Jesus that, when he left earth for heaven, the love and pity that made his actions so beautiful and glorious here died out of his heart there? If he worked miracles here, to heal the diseased, to restore the insane, and to give sight to the blind, what has happened to him that he does not seek the lost in the other world? If it is said he cannot, that is a bare assumption. What I would ask the believer in eternal punishments to account for is the stupendous change that is said to have passed upon Jesus,—a change so stupendous as to have utterly and radically transformed him. It would only have been what we might expect if we had been told that, in the Unseen, Jesus was constantly engaged with his like-minded disciples in seeking to rescue lost souls from their sin, and misery, and despair. That would have been in harmony

with his life and actions here, and Christian men and women might have longed for heaven as affording them the consummation of their purest and least selfish desires. But, to tell us that Jesus in heaven will for ever acquiesce in the hopeless torture of lost souls, is so to transform him as to practically put a new Jesus in his stead. We may, therefore, cherish this belief, and, if we are consistent, we must cherish this belief, that Jesus is in heaven what he was on earth; and there is nothing in his earth-life to lead to the conclusion that he could calmly endure the spectacle of eternal torment—nay, there is everything in his life to lead to the conclusion that he will never rest while a sinner remains to be brought in and forgiven, or while one wretched soul needs pity or relief.

Last of all, let us turn to his *teachings*. And here, unless we are on our guard, we shall at last fall into the evil and useless course of quoting isolated texts. I want to avoid that, and to take a broad and general view of the teaching of Jesus, without either picking out or avoiding isolated passages, especially in view of the fact that the possible inconsistency lies here. I think, then, we may very safely say that we shall not go far

wrong if, in attempting to ascertain what, according to the gospels, were really the teachings of Jesus, we appeal to these three great representative and most characteristic sources of information and evidence,—the Lord's Prayer, the Parables, and the Sermon on the Mount. If the teachings of Jesus are to be found anywhere, they are to be found here. The Lord's Prayer is the model prayer, the Parables are model lessons, and the Sermon on the Mount is the model sermon.

The Lord's Prayer, from beginning to end, knows nothing of eternal punishments. It calls God our Father: it asks that His name may be everywhere hallowed and nowhere blasphemed: it asks that His kingdom may come and His will be done: it asks for daily bread: it asks God to forgive in the same way that merciful men here forgive: it asks to be led out of temptation and delivered from evil: and it ends with a burst of holy confidence that the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, belong to God, for ever. Every word of this is inconsistent with the idea that God will torment any of His creatures for ever, and permit the existence of an eternal Hell, full of blaspheming enemies or despairing sufferers. He is our Father. He desires His name to be hallowed. He

has a kingdom and a will, and these are to be made victorious. He is asked to forgive, and forgiveness is defined as the mercy man shews to man,—not another kind of mercy but the same. He is our leader out of temptation and evil, and to Him belong the kingdom, and the power, and the glory for ever. But the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, do not belong to God, they are shared by Him with Satan, if the “orthodox” doctrine of punishment is true.

The Parables are even more significant. Think of the parable of the king who at once forgave his servant the tremendous debt; of the parable of the two debtors, in which we find the same thought of abounding mercy; of the parable of the lost sheep; of the parable of the prodigal son, that prince of parables; and then say what these teach if they do not teach the abounding love and compassion of that God who has said—“I have no pleasure in the death of the sinner: wherefore return and live.” In these parables Jesus pictures the love and kindness and pity of men; the father’s love, the shepherd’s care, the king’s compassion and princely kindness, and he says—‘This is like God’s love, like God’s care, like God’s compassion and kindness; and I say the very

idea of God eternally refusing mercy or aid to millions of His children defiles these parables, and crushes the life and soul out of them. It is true that in some of the parables there are references to punishment, and even torment, in the future life; and it is not here denied that there are punishments and torments there: all that is denied is that these are vindictive and necessarily eternal. There is the parable of the rich man in hell, for instance. All I observe now is, that heaven is not far from hell, even according to that parable; that there is nothing said there about the eternity of the torment endured; and that the sufferings of the rich man seem already to have improved him, making him to long for redemption,—making him humble and penitent, and thoughtful for those he had left behind. It is true also that, in another parable, Jesus speaks of shutting out, casting out, and even of everlasting punishment: but we must face the apparent inconsistency, and make our choice. It is now very generally admitted that these phrases are of doubtful meaning: and we are told, even by “orthodoxy,” to let Scripture explain itself. That is what I earnestly wish to let Scripture do;—to let the whole scope and spirit of the teachings of Jesus explain

these very doubtful words and phrases here and there, that exist only like spots on the sun.

The Sermon on the Mount is, from first to last, a grand vindication of God's love and mercy, and is, in spirit, absolutely inconsistent with the idea of God as an eternal tormentor, or as one who acquiesces in the eternal tormenting of the lost. What are the leading thoughts of that sermon? First comes that lovely procession of beatitudes:—Blessed are the gentle; blessed are the mourners; blessed are the meek; blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness; blessed are the merciful; blessed are the pure in heart; blessed are the peacemakers? Is God gentle? Is God a mourner over lost souls? Is God meek? Is God righteous? Is God merciful? Is God pure? Is God a peacemaker? Why every one of these beatitudes is a condemnation of God Himself, if the doctrine of eternal torments, inflicted by God, be true. He is not gentle, if He is eternally vindictive. He is not a mourner over sin and sorrow if, without pity, He can see millions of wretched souls in torment, yea, Himself torment them, and still be the perfectly happy God. He is not righteous, if, for the errors or the mere unbelief of a few years, He crushes the soul with the agonies

of an eternity. He is not merciful, if He will never hear one wail of despair, one cry for help, floating up with the smoke of the torment from the place of pain. He is not pure, if, with the power to conquer sin at last, He does not do it. He is not a peace-maker, if He makes no effort to conquer with love the enmities of hell; but if, for ever, He gives the lost good reason for hating so cruel and tyrannous a rule. And in this very sermon what does Jesus say about mercy and forgiveness? If you bring your gift to the altar, in an act of worship, and suddenly remember that you have a quarrel with a fellow man, leave your gift there, says Jesus: never mind the proprieties of worship; go out of the temple, be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift; for mercy is before sacrifice, and reconciliation is better than praise. So we might say of God in heaven. If He is with the happy angels, receiving their homage and listening to their praise, and if He remembers the dark and miserable hosts of hell, let Him go forth and conquer with His love the enmity of these alien hearts, and then return, and with Him His recovered subjects, to receive homage and praise never known even in heaven before. And if Jesus is in heaven,

and is happy there, and he remembers the millions who are in hell for not believing in him, as men say, let him remember his own words, let him earn afresh the blessedness of the peace-maker, let him leave his heavenly gifts before the altar in his beautiful heaven, let him go and be reconciled to his suffering and perhaps repentant brothers, and then come and offer his gifts. "Love your enemies," says he in this sermon, "bless them that curse you, that ye may be the children of your Father who is in heaven." Does God love His enemies, then? Does He bless those that curse Him? What! love His enemies in hell? Does He show His love by "fanning the flame of their torment with the breath of His mouth," as Mr. Spurgeon says? Does He bless them, as "orthodoxy" everywhere says, by shutting them up for ever in a hell which shall never be opened for a soul's return? It is impossible—monstrous. "Be ye therefore perfect," says this sermon of Jesus, "even as your Father in heaven is perfect." If that is true, then an eternal hell is not true. If that is true, then we shall yet find the tender mercy of the Lord abounding over all His works.

Let us take Jesus at his word; and accept

him for what he shewed himself to be on earth. Let us not crush our faith in him into the limits of a few Bible texts. Look at his character, look at his office, look at his life, look at his teachings, and then say whether we must not go elsewhere to find the doctrine of eternal torments and unaided misery in an eternal hell; and whether, he himself being judge, the destiny of man in a future life is not that of one whom his Creator will bring out of darkness into His marvellous light.

“Dear Jesus! were thy spirit now on earth,
Where thou hast prayed, and toiled, a world to win,—
What vast ideas would sudden rise to birth,
What strong endeavours 'gainst o'ermastering sin.
Thy blest beatitudes again thou'dst speak ;
But, with deep-hearted words that scorch like fire,
Would'st thou rebuke the oppressors of the weak :
Or, turning thence to prophets that aspire,
How would'st thou cheer the men who toil to save
Their brothers, smarting 'neath a despot's rod,
To lift the poor, the fallen, and the slave,
And lead them all alike to worship God!
Bigots would'st thou rebuke,—that idle stand,—
But send thy gospel-fraught apostles conquering thro'
the land!”

3.—THE WITNESS BORNE BY NATURE AND HUMAN NATURE.

The appeal to Nature will appear hopeful or questionable according to the view taken of

Nature's power to reveal the thought of God. For my own part, I come to Nature with absolute delight. Nature, to me, is a revelation from God; not God's word written, but God's word transacted, vitalised. Nature, it is true, is not simple, but manifold. She is not all fondness to her children, but sometimes hard and stern. But she works for restoration, for healing, for righteousness, for life. She hungers for "the fittest," and provides for its "survival;" and she urges on her children from lower to higher things. She is inexorable, but bears no grudges; and the moment of the sinner's contrition and obedience is the moment of the return of her benediction. If we break her laws a hundred times, a hundred times she will hold us to that result; but if we learn wisdom and obey, she will treat us as though we had never sinned. The consequences of past wrong-doing, indeed, will not be swept away, but she gives no hint of a God who will take no heed of a better mind, and answers not the sinner's repentant cry. On the contrary, she is full of suggestions as to the reality of that

"One, far-off, divine event

To which the whole creation moves ;"

the redemption of the race from all its evil

conditions, and its ultimate entrance into true life, the joyous, bright, and beautiful life of the emancipated spirit, in the Unseen.

But it is to Human Nature we may turn with greatest confidence ; for, if Nature is a revelation from God, Human Nature is much more clearly a revelation, speaking with more solemn sanctions, and in more penetrating tones. God made man : that is the first article of a true faith ; and, inasmuch as the maker is careful to leave some mark on his work that shall bear witness to himself, so I believe God has dealt with man. And what does man's nature, at its best, predict as to his destiny in a future life ? Is not the testimony of Human Nature all in one direction ? Whether we think of human sorrow or joy, remorse or aspiration, the scars of sin or the sanctities of holiness, the anxieties that oppress or the love that blesses, the sympathies that bind us to one another or the love of life for ourselves, we are equally led to the conclusion that life and not death, advance and not destruction, promotion and not ruin, await this great struggling mass of humanity on the other side.

And now it is certain that the question of eternal punishment is exciting the religious world simply because the witness that God has placed

in the human conscience and the human heart is speaking, and will not be still. Human Nature is asserting itself; and, in asserting itself, it is bearing witness to and for God. It is true that we are imperfect and sinful beings, but the good God has not given us wholly up to evil; and He has kept alive in our souls enough of the Divine Nature we derived from Him, to make us competent judges of what is just and unjust, merciful and cruel, right and wrong. We need not wish to deny that our Human Nature is a fallen Human Nature; but let any one beware how he denies that Human Nature is still a witness for Truth and God. He who denies this, runs the risk of obliterating all abiding distinctions between good and evil, because he denies that we are able to judge of what in God would be right or wrong. The foundation of all faith and morals is this,—the capacity of Human Nature to distinguish between eternal good and evil. Here, then, is the standard to which we appeal,—the standard God Himself has set up in every heart. We are told to be “imitators of God, as beloved children;” but how can that be unless we can tell what is right,—unless we can see and judge that what God does is just and right and good?

In the first place, then, I point to the fact that the doctrine of eternal punishment is repugnant to Human Nature. As a matter of fact, is not the testimony of Human Nature dead against it? Is there any one anywhere who would eternally torture another? and is it not a fact that the better we become the less inclined we are to anything of the kind? What does that great fact say, as to the revealed will of God? There is a very simple test here which really is, in itself, conclusive,—that there is scarcely a defender of the doctrine to be found who does not feel its awfulness, and who, when pressed, does not frankly declare, “I wish it were not true.” I have conversed with, perhaps, some thousands of persons who have defended the doctrine, but I think I never met with one who said—“The doctrine is true, and I am *glad* of it.” One of the most popular and most respectable of modern commentators, Albert Barnes, says of the difficulties Human Nature finds in believing such doctrines as this:—“These are real, not imaginary difficulties. They are probably felt by every mind that ever reflected on the subject, and they are unexplained, unmitigated, unremoved. I confess, for one, that I feel them, and feel them more sensibly and powerfully

the more I look at them and the longer I live. I do not understand these facts" (what a sorrowful thing that he was not able to go a step further, respect the leadings of God's spirit in his own nature, and utterly *deny* these supposed "facts!")—"and I make no advances towards understanding them. I have never seen a particle of light thrown on these subjects, that has given a moment's ease to my tortured mind, nor have I an explanation to offer, or a thought to suggest, which would be of relief to you." (And this from a man who has travelled right through the land of commentators and divines!) "I confess, when I look on a world of sinners and of sufferers, upon death-beds and grave-yards, upon the world of woe, filled with hosts to suffer for ever and ever, and see my friends, my parents, my family, my fellow-citizens; when I look upon a whole race, all involved in this sin and anger; when I see the great mass of them wholly unconverted; and when I feel that God only can save them, and yet he does not do it, I am struck dumb. It is all dark, dark, dark, to my soul, and I cannot disguise it." That is the testimony of an honest and earnest man. He clings to a doctrine because he thinks it revealed, but his Human Nature rebels against

it ; and he goes stumbling on, unable to fling it away, and yet unable to call this frightful evil, good. We must respect a mind like that. We can only respect a mind that is oppressed with the burden of this doctrine, and must sympathise with a thoughtful writer who said this doctrine had driven many people mad, and that he very much respected those who went mad when they believed it. People who believe it *ought* to go mad. If they were in deadly earnest, if they really looked their own doctrine in the face, if they realized the tremendous fact (if fact it is,) that millions are now screaming in a hopeless hell of torment, if they realized the fact (if fact it is,) that millions more are rushing headlong to their doom, and that only the thin veil of the senses prevents us hearing the cries and seeing the tortures of the lost, if they believed and realized this, they *ought* to go mad. Shame upon their intelligence and their hearts, that they do not !

But the truth is, the doctrine is not realized. It is accepted, but it is not faced ; it is held, but it is not vitally believed. A late writer has said, "I hardly like to refer to a class of Christians who apparently regard this terrible teaching with satisfaction. The sufferings of a

slave excite their liveliest pity: they would make any effort to save a condemned murderer from the gallows; the vivisection of a poor dog would fill them with horror; and yet they can complacently contemplate a dogma which declares the eternal torments of myriads of their fellow human beings! I have heard it taught and advocated by those who have been sipping their wine and enjoying their dessert!" This is true, but it is shocking, and indicates that the doctrine is not realized, and is not, therefore, vitally believed. If men believed it, they would scarcely be able to waste an hour in pleasure or repose: they would live, they would die, beseeching men to avoid the eternal wrath of God.

The testimony which I quoted just now, as indicating the voice of our common Human Nature, is one that has been often heard. Dean Milman, in his History of Latin Christianity, says, "To the eternity of hell torments there is and ever must be, notwithstanding the peremptory decrees of dogmatic theology, a tacit repugnance;" and another fine mind declared that if he could see his way out of it, it would be "a prodigious relief."

What are all these cries but the protests of Human Nature against a lie? And how is it

that, in our own day, the doctrine is crumbling to pieces in all the Churches? and that the Unitarian, who once stood alone in denying it, has now a host of companions all round? The New Testament is the same, the creeds are the same, the doctrines to be believed are the same. Yes, but Human Nature is not the same as to the force and energy of its testimony; and men, driven by the sheer necessities of their own natures, are working their way out of it.

And still further, as regards this testimony of Human Nature, who is not familiar with the fact that, in the time of trouble or in the hour of death, belief in this doctrine utterly breaks down? No phrase is more common at such a time than the phrase "He is better off." And it is strange that this is said of nearly every one. Indeed of *every* one, by *some* one. For the worst man, when he is dead, will have some one to bemoan him—some poor ill-used wife who, in that dark hour, will feel in her sad worn heart, the re-birth of what was once a young passion, though she had long unlearnt her early dream of love; or some sorrowful mother who will forget all her poor boy's wilful ways, and remember only that he was her son; or some pitying neighbour

or merciful heart who will say, even for the wickedest—"Poor soul! he is surely better off." Yes, thank God, in the testing time of trouble men and women are wiser and more merciful than their creeds. The truth is, the doctrine cannot be carried out. The preacher in the pulpit may call upon his hearers to do this or accept that on pain of being eternally lost; but if his hearers become hearers no more, but John and James who lie dead at home, the whole thing is changed, and the *heart* tells the truth though it belies the creed. Now we must try to teach the people that what they give up in the time of trouble, when they are flung back upon the natural God-given emotions and instincts of the human heart, they ought to give up at other times.

I say, then, no one can consistently think by this doctrine and act by it in daily life. I ask any believer in it, whether he ever yet looked upon a man or woman on whom he could lay his hands and say—"This man or this woman will, I believe, be tortured by God in an eternal hell?" I say to him: Do you think I shall be? If not, why not? I reject the doctrine of the Trinity, I hate the doctrine of salvation by shed blood, I detest the doctrines of election and reprobation, I believe

none of the orthodox doctrines they say are necessary to salvation; and yet I defy you to really believe that in a few years or days, I shall begin my eternity of torment. John Milton was not a Trinitarian, Dr. Channing denied all the orthodoxies, Florence Nightingale thinks pretty much as I do, Thomas Carlyle thought Calvinism itself deserves hell-fire, the poet Longfellow was a Unitarian, so was Charles Dickens, and so was Lloyd Garrison. Do you believe any of these will be eternally tormented? Or if you have given up the idea that men will be damned for their opinions, what do you say of the last collier or dock labourer who died drunk, and knew nothing of the way of salvation? Will he be eternally tormented? If you had the tormenting of him, would *you* never help him or let him off? The poor fellow was perhaps the child of a drunken collier or dock labourer like himself, was born into the very midst of the dirt, the poverty, the passion, and the darkness, of a drunkard's home; he had few chances and scarcely any aid, and drink and degradation rocked his cradle and led him up to riper years. Will the just God torment *that* man for ever? What does Human Nature say to that? Why, Human Nature says that if the

angels in heaven do not help that man, and if they do not spend eternity in trying to give him a chance of rising, instead of crushing and tormenting him, the angels sadly need some of the gracious men and women now on earth to teach them better. The fact is, the doctrine breaks down the moment we try to apply it; or, if any one succeeds in really believing and applying it, he becomes a bigot and a persecutor. He then becomes honest and consistent, indeed, but he then becomes hateful and unbearable: and every man *ought* to be hateful and unbearable who believes and applies the doctrine that God will torment lost souls for ever in hell.

This leads me to note in the next place that this doctrine makes God less humane than man. I need not dwell on this; but distinct mention of the fact is desirable. Unless all our emotions, feelings, and affections, are deceptive, we must believe that they represent the eternal realities of mercy, pity, love, and goodwill: and yet we, who are so imperfect, shudder at the very thought of doing, ourselves, what is imputed to God. All modern legislation in the way of providing for punishment is becoming sober and merciful, and aims rather to reform than merely to wreak vengeance on the

offender. It is only in a rude, a savage, and a stupidly indolent stage of existence, that society punishes every offence with death, and falls upon the culprit with hate and rage. As society advances, all this is altered, and punishment becomes a great art, which takes note of a thousand things that mere brute vengeance knows nothing of. Now, the doctrine of eternal and indiscriminate torture in hell belongs to a stage of civilisation we have got far beyond: only, in theology and the Church, we move more slowly than in politics and the State. Hence the fact, that we have always to be pushing and striving in religion when the work is almost done in secular affairs. But this fact (for fact it is,) that the doctrine of eternal punishment in hell pictures man as more humane than God, is one that is destined to tell greatly upon the public mind in aid of the coming change.

I would here interpose a few words concerning the "glorying in the Gospel," as it is called, which, in the circumstances, seems to me so shocking and repulsive. Orthodox persons, sincerely enough I doubt not, call their Gospel "good tidings;" but, though it may be that to the saved, what is it to the lost? And it seems to me that the fate of the lost

ought to go a long way towards moderating the joys and the glorying of any one who believes he is among the saved. It seems to me that common humanity should lead a saint to go into heaven with a very moderate amount of glorying, if he knows that so many of his brethren are going to be eternally damned. An "orthodox" minister who has very lately come round to better thoughts, puts this well. He says:—"Suppose a case in illustration. I am a poor man. I receive a letter which assures me of my being entitled to vast wealth. In the same letter it is announced, and on equal authority, that my brother, 'the son of my mother,' about whom my affections twine, whom I have learned to regard as a part of myself, is a convicted felon, is doomed to the just but galling penalty of life-long disgrace—expatriation and hard labour. Shall I go among my friends exhibiting this letter, exulting in its contents as being emphatically 'good news,' and never wearying of sounding its praises? What and if, having respect to my welfare, it so describes itself? 'Blood is thicker than water.' 'Love is stronger than death.' If my estate might go to purchase my brother's pardon—good; if not, it brings me no joy, and the document announcing it

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mine is to me no gospel. Congratulations on my inheritance are in the worst taste, for I can never contemplate my own good fortune without being reminded of his stricken, agonised, and hopeless condition." I speak of this because there has been, and is (in Churches calling themselves Christian, and on the part of men calling themselves Christian teachers), a kind of exultation, shall I say a gloating, over the idea of salvation—ay! and of damnation, which is utterly repugnant to anything deserving the name of humanity.

I pass on now to notice the most startling and serious point in this appeal to Human Nature. It is hard to see how Human Nature can *here* endure the doctrine of eternal punishment; but it is almost infinitely more difficult to see how Human Nature can do it, when purified and perfected hereafter. And yet this is what we are told is the fact; we are even told, in every variety of affirmation and illustration, that the saved in heaven acquiesce and even glory in the damnation of the lost in hell. A popular orthodox tract says:—"The lost are tormented within sight of angels and the Lord of angels, and yet no one goes forth to their rescue." It is enough to make one say—Then the Lord keep me from ever becoming an angel,

if the effect of the transformation is to give me a heart of stone! Jonathan Edwards says:—"However the saints in heaven may have loved the damned whilst here, their eternal damnation will only serve to increase a relish of their own enjoyments." And the great modern Calvinist, Mr. Spurgeon says:—"What will you think when the last day comes, to hear Christ say, Depart ye cursed, and there will be a voice just behind him saying, Amen; and as you enquire whence came that voice, you will find it was your mother. Or, young woman, when thou art cast away into utter darkness, what will you think to hear a voice saying Amen—and, as you look, there sits your father, his lips still moving with the solemn curse?" "What will you think?" asks Mr. Spurgeon. The question has been answered by one who, in rejecting Mr. Spurgeon's Calvinism, was led to reject Christianity altogether:—"What will the lost think when they see their sainted parents calmly acquiescing in their damnation? "Why, that it has been their lot to be born of parents unworthy of the holy epithets of father and mother, and that one consolation in the bitter cup of agony still remained, in the fact that they were separated for ever from such heartless wretches." And yet we are told, this is

what will come of being transformed into an angel !

I want to know how people are going to explain away all that. I want to know how they are going to account for this ghastly unconcern of the angels, and this wicked selfishness of heaven? For if this doctrine be true, *all* are changed. God is changed, for He loves, and pities, and forgives no more. Christ is changed, for he no longer yearns over the miserable and despairing, and cares no longer to seek and save that which is lost. The sweet and holy souls of earth who found all their delight in doing good are changed; and our own dear friends who would have laid down their lives for us here, are changed, and changed for the worse. I want to know how they are going to account for it, so as to save heaven and the angels from eternal infamy and shame. A great Calvinist once *did* try to explain it, and this is what he said:—"God will, in mercy extinguish the susceptibilities of the saved." In other words,—God will take away the bright love out of the mother's heart for her poor lost child, and will take out of the father's heart all care for his damned and despairing child. In other words, again, he will take from us the only things that now sanctify and bless our lives.

O my God! great and gracious One, whom Jesus taught me to call my "Father"—help me never, never again to believe it! Help me to think of Thy redeemed children as making the Universe radiant with Thy love, and as spending eternity in redeeming it from every trace of misery and sin.

4.—THE TEACHINGS OF THE BIBLE CONCERNING
MAN'S DESTINY IN A FUTURE LIFE.

The generally accepted belief is that the Bible is our only authority,—that its decision is final,—that, however much any particular statement may shock reason and conscience and the affections, we must believe it as God's revealed word. This belief, however, is rapidly giving way; and, in the end, it will be seen to be not only an untenable view, but an essentially irreligious one; for, more and more, it will come into conflict with the trust of the living soul in a living God. There is only one way of knowing whether a doctrine is from God;—by testing it: and there is only one way of testing it;—we must judge of things by their qualities, and we can only conclude that a doctrine is from God when it is God-like. And yet I am about to consider the teachings of the Bible concerning

man's destiny in the future life. And why? Mainly because I believe the Bible has not been properly treated by any side, in relation to this serious question.

The Bible does not profess to be a supreme authority. It is not even consistent. It is a collection of ancient books of very different values, and is to be read with this fact in view. In opening the Bible, moreover, to question it, we must remember a fact that is only too often forgotten,—that the Bible is consistent all through, on not one subject. We cannot quote the Bible fairly unless we quote both sides: and this is very seldom done. How is it that the common saying is literally true,—that we can prove almost anything from the Bible? How is it that sects the most opposite in doctrine do appeal to the Bible for their diverse beliefs? How is it that men can go on, apparently for ever, fighting the battle of the texts? The simple explanation is that the Bible is not a consistent book, that both sides are really, to some extent, represented in it, and that there are, in the Bible, marks of change and progress such as ought to be expected in a book which has received contributions from such distant ages and from so many different hands. The Bible does not speak with one voice, and it is

only habit, or inattention, or increasing credulity, that prevents the recognition of this.

One of the most prevalent popular errors in what is called "the religious world" is, that the ancient Hebrews had a clear, perfect, and undoubted revelation from God as to the immortality of the soul, and the reality and nature of a world beyond the grave. Without reflection, and without doubt, the affirmation would be very generally made, that this was indeed the case. And yet nothing could be much farther from the truth. The ancient Hebrews were, in reality, a long way behind Egypt and Persia and Assyria in this matter; and what, in the course of time, they did believe concerning the soul and a life after death, they believed chiefly as the result of their intercourse with the nations I have mentioned. It is true that in the lives of the patriarchs we have brought before us a simple, steadfast, child-like trust in God which seems to us inseparable from belief in life with God hereafter; but it is anything but clear that this is a correct representation of what was true of the patriarchs themselves. And, besides this, it is certain that we seek in vain for clearness and light when, in the Old Testament, we seek for what *we* call faith in the active life of the soul when the body is

laid in the grave. It must also be borne in mind, that even such passages in the Old Testament as do seem to imply such an existence for the soul hereafter, are of doubtful authenticity and value as shewing us the general and primitive faith of the Hebrews: for nothing is more certain than that the writings and the faiths with which the Hebrews became acquainted in Egypt, Persia, and Babylon, had an unmistakeable influence over the writers of the various books now known as the ancient literature of the Hebrews.

There are many passages in the Psalms which almost assert the extinction of the soul with the body: and there are still more which sound more like the wail and the sigh of one who clings to life here because he can see no light and hear no voice beyond. In the book of Ecclesiastes, what a deep and desperate despair is in those words—"There is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the under-world, whither thou goest." "That which befalleth the sons of men is that which befalleth beasts; as the one dieth so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath, so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast." Hence we constantly find that rewards and punishments are spoken of as belonging to this life. "Length

of days," "Dwelling long in the land," "Riches and honour," "God's favour" in giving prosperity and saving from violence,—such are the blessings to which the righteous are told to look forward. It is true that in one book we are told that "the wicked shall be turned into the underworld, and all the nations that forget God," but it does not appear that this means more than that such nations should come to a speedier end than others,—as though the writer said—'They that forget God and do wickedly shall hasten their end. The righteous shall depart peacefully when they have lived their day; but the wicked shall be hurried and hurled from their place.' The word translated "Hell" in our English version did not at all mean to the Hebrews what the word *Hell* does to us. That word is *Sheol*; and it simply meant, as I just now read it, the under-world to which all would have to go.

But though this is the general characteristic of the Hebrew writings, there is a very great deal, which, treated as cumulative evidence, will lead, I think, to the conclusion that the more thoughtful, and perhaps, to take the other extreme, the more simple-minded amongst the ancient Hebrews really did believe in a future existence, but of a kind so shadowy, dim, and impalpable that it

can only just be called "existence." The Hebrew word I used just now, *Sheol*, is the word which stood for the name of that vast, dreary, mysterious under-world in which we may suppose many of the ancient Hebrews believed. It was very much the counterpart of the Hades of the Greeks,—a region of silence, inactivity, and almost negation of being; whose inhabitants are neither happy nor miserable, without sensation of pleasure or pain, silent, powerless, intangible. The word "shade," which even we sometimes use for an immortal spirit, well describes what the Hebrews, in common with the Greeks, may have believed with regard to the dead. In the world where they dwelt, "the wicked" did indeed "cease from troubling," and "the weary" were "at rest." But it was a ceasing from trouble and a rest which no brave man would desire. At first, then, this seemed to be the belief of the ancient Hebrews when their faith in a future life began to dawn. Like the mist in the valley at day-dawn was that faith, on which the rising sunbeams as yet hardly shine with even the faintest ray. In that deep world, deeper than the grave, they believed all would go,—the good, the bad, the wise, the foolish, the young, the old;—one deep unbroken silence reigning, one dim weird light glimmering over all.

Mixed up with this belief, however, there was the germ of a better and a brighter faith. They looked downward for the fathers, but they looked upward for their fathers' God. There, beyond the glorious sky, dwelt Jehovah and the holy angels: there did He look down upon the children of men, who, as yet, did not dare perhaps to hope they could ever climb those splendid battlements of the skies. Here and there, however, we have a glimpse of something better, indicating a feeling of unrest, a yearning, as of a wanderer longing to return to his native home.

One of the most striking, curious, and conclusive proofs that some kind of belief existed amongst the ancient Hebrews, in some kind of future life, is the singular fact that they held it to be possible to "call up" the spirits of the dead. Whether this could or could not be done matters not for our purpose just now: it suffices to know that they believed it to be possible: and this alone indicates belief in an existence after death. Thus the woman who, in one of the books of the Old Testament, is called a woman having "a familiar spirit," is said to have "brought up" the dead prophet Samuel, who had been buried at Ramah, sixty miles away: and it appears that the

possibility of this was in accordance with the accepted faith; so that an existence after death, however shadowy, must have been believed in. The severe repressive measures that were taken against what the people believed to be spirit-intercourse, indicates also the wide-spread existence of this faith in some kind of future state. But this faith was of the barest and most poverty-stricken kind,—as destitute of poetry as of distinctness,—joyless, heartless, hopeless,—cold as the grave, desolate as death. But, in connection with this, there is a delightful phrase which lights up a little even this vague and dreary faith. We read again and again, of being “gathered to his fathers:”—a phrase which may not have meant what it means to us, but still a phrase which looked beyond the tomb and which seemed to link the living with the so-called dead,—a phrase which perhaps was the germ or the indication of the germ of the better faith of the future.

About 150 years before the time of Christ, the faith of the Hebrews concerning a future life underwent a great change. To that period we must assign a considerable portion of the Book of Daniel, together with the striking passage to be found in it—“Many of the sleepers of the dust of the ground shall awake, those to life

everlasting, and these to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that are wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever." To about the same age, or a little later, we must assign some of the apocryphal books in which we find equally emphatic assertions of a future state of sharply defined distinctions, with rewards and punishments, a bodily resurrection, and even the doctrine of the transmigration of the soul, so clearly shewing the influence of foreign ideas. Is it not strange that the very people we have been taught to call "the chosen people," "the people of God," should be the people of all others the least ardent in their belief and the least clear in their hope of everlasting life; and that it should have been left for Persia, Egypt, and Babylon to put a little warmth and life into their dim and sluggish faith?

Coming now to the time of Jesus, we meet with one whose influence can never be left out of the history of the Christian religion; his name was *Philo*, a true Israelite, a native of Alexandria, a devoted Platonist, who wrote and taught in Egypt while Jesus went about doing good in Palestine. He gave up the gross idea of the resurrection of the body, and surpassed many modern Christians by

holding and teaching the proper immortality of the soul. Some of his sayings are very beautiful:—"A polished, purified soul," he says, "does not die, but emigrates: it is of an inextinguishable and deathless race, and goes to heaven, escaping the dissolution and corruption which death seems to introduce." He seemed to hold, in a modified form, the doctrine of a return of some souls to mortal bodies, to live in these new bodies a second life: but in every case he speaks of the body as the sepulchre of the soul, from which the soul is glad to be delivered. It is not likely that Jesus knew anything of Philo, except by report and perhaps from his writings: but what is certain is, that Philo's teaching had a significant influence upon the Christianity of after days.

Surrounding Jesus himself were the three leading sects of Palestine;—the Sadducees, denying in their indolent sceptical way all existence after death; the Essenes, believing very much as Philo did; and the Pharisees, the really popular and powerful sect, affirming, according to Josephus, that the strict keepers of the law would, after death, be allowed to live again in new bodies, while the neglectful would be doomed to what Christians now would call hell. In the Talmud, that extraordinary literary monument of Rabbinical

sense and nonsense, wit and poetry, philosophy and romancing, we get remarkable glimpses into the inner brain and heart of Jewry in this matter. The writers of that curious compilation seem to agree in this,—that there is a life after death, that this after-life may be wretched or happy, that the wretchedness and the happiness are determined by moral and spiritual considerations, and that a great day impended, when Messiah would come to rescue the myriads of souls waiting in purgatory for deliverance, and to make Israel glorious and happy before an envious or even afflicted gentile world. Any one can see how much of this, (the gathered faith of ages,) has had its influence upon what is called the Christian faith: every one can see that the simple faith of Jesus, itself probably not a little tinctured with these existing ideas, must have received much from the Judaism into the midst of which it was born: and, in truth, he would be a wise man who would take for us this curious fabric of modern orthodoxy, and, disentangling the threads for us, one by one, shew us which were of Jesus, and which were brought from foreign sources,—from Babylon, from Egypt, and from Persia, through Judaic hands. The resurrection of the body, the existence of a fiery hell, the horrible idea of eternal, hopeless misery,

the doctrine of a last day,—all these are older than Jesus, and some of them doubtless were received into the fabric of Christianity, not at his hands.

Thus, then, we have traced the rise and progress of the Hebrew idea of a future life;—beginning in a vague, colourless, and cheerless idea of mere shadowy existence, without distinction of sensation because almost devoid of sensation; this developing itself into the doctrine of a resurrection for the righteous; and that again becoming developed into the idea of a division of the under-world into a kind of heaven and hell. And all this, occupying for ages the human mind, and probably oppressing the human heart, only just brings us to the feet of Jesus. What does that suggest to us? Does it not bid us beware how we claim for one race all the movements of God's spirit and all the leadings of God's hand? For ages before Jesus came, men had been feeling after God, if haply they might find Him—had been listening to the yearning cries of the awakened soul. We have already seen what Jesus did to draw aside the veil; and we are all the more prepared to do justice to it because we frankly acknowledge that when *he* spoke it was not the first time that men had heard the voice of God speaking

to them from the lips of one who communed with the Unseen.

Turning now to the main question, the destiny of man in the future life, we shall find that there is but little in the Bible, on this subject, that is thoroughly consistent and definite. Holding the view already expressed concerning the want of consistency in the Bible on this subject, it would not startle me very much, and I am sure it would not move me at all, if a few passages really did teach the doctrine of eternal punishment. I should be sorry to see the texts there, but I should be still more sorry for the man or men who wrote them: and I should be sorriest of all for the men and women who could accept and believe them now. But my belief is that the Bible nowhere plainly and distinctly asserts the doctrine of eternal and utterly hopeless punishment for individuals. It says something of eternal death and unquenchable fire, and paints in awful colours the fate of the "lost," but it is not at all clear that it teaches unequivocally the doctrine now held. On the other hand, it says very much about the perfections of God's character, the triumph of God's government, and the unchangeableness of God's love: so that in quoting passages which declare God will cast out the sinner from His presence,

it is only fair also to remember that the same book declares His mercy endureth for ever. It ought also to be remembered that the Bible nowhere presents "the saved" in a light so repulsive as to warrant us in concluding that they can be for ever happy in the knowledge that multitudes of "the lost" are in the "outer darkness," where there are only "weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth." In considering man's destiny in a future life we must remember those whom Jesus blessed,—the pure in heart, the merciful, the peacemakers; those who are called "ministering spirits," and who became such by being gracious and pitiful on earth. We must remember it is distinctly on record that those who are welcomed into the heavenly kingdom are welcomed because they once fed the hungry, clothed the naked, and sought out the imprisoned. That being so, we get a glimpse into the possible, nay the probable destiny of the saved,—a destiny which may find its crowning glory and blessedness, in continuing the merciful redeeming work of earth. But now, let us look a little closely into the matter; and we can do so all the more fairly and freely because we are not hampered with the notion that all depends on a chain of texts.

The passages that are supposed to teach the

endlessness of future punishments in hell are of two kinds:—first, passages that mainly refer to the place of punishment, and second, passages that refer to its duration. Look first, then, at those that refer to the *place*.

In the Old Testament the word in question is *Sheol*: but this word, unfortunately, has been variously translated. In thirty-two places the word has been translated “hell”; in thirty-one “grave,” and in three “pit.” “In all such cases,” says a cautious and reliable scholar, “and probably everywhere throughout the Old Testament, the rendering “grave,” or some nearly equivalent expression should have been adhered to.” The Jews, in truth, had very little idea of a future life; and still more vague were their ideas concerning anything like our modern hell. In such passages, therefore, as Psalm xvi. 10,—“Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, thou wilt not suffer Thy holy one to see corruption,” the meaning clearly is, “Thou wilt not leave my soul in the grave,” or in the gloomy under-world. In Isaiah xxxviii. 18, the word is rendered “grave,”—“For the grave cannot praise Thee, death cannot celebrate thee.” And yet it is the same Hebrew word—“*Sheol*,” the word for the dim, dreary, vague, under-world. In the book of Jonah, containing

the absurd story of Jonah's sojourn inside the whale, he is represented as praying to God "out of the fish's belly." and this is part of his prayer,—“Out of the belly of hell cried I.” Certainly his was not a place of eternal torments. But the case is useful as showing how loosely the word “hell” was used. So much, then, for the Old Testament.

In the New Testament we have not one word to deal with but two. These are *Hades*, and *Gehenna*. The word *Hades* was the word chosen by the Greek translators of the Old Testament more than 2,000 years ago, as the translation of the Hebrew word *Sheol*; that word, therefore, follows the fate of the original word; and neither has anything to do with the modern hell. *Hades*, with the ancient Greeks (and it is *their* word) meant the vast under-world, the general gathering-place of departed souls. It really means the invisible place,—in fact, the place of spectres. The other word is *Gehenna*. Of this word, Dr. Vance Smith says: “Now *Gehenna*, it is well known, was the name of a valley on the south-west of Jerusalem. Here, in ancient times, children had been burnt in sacrifice to the heathen god Moloch. Hence, the place was looked upon by the later Jews as polluted

and abominable. Its name, associated with burning fires and human sacrifices became the representative of the miserable state into which, it was believed, the ungodly would be cast at the coming of the Messiah. Probably, at first, Gehenna would be thought of as the actual scene of the punishment thus anticipated. At all events, that future scene had come to be spoken of under the abhorred name long before the time of Christ. He, therefore, in his teaching, adopts, without hesitation or comment, the usual expressions of his day, applying them to his own purpose of denoting the future retributive consequences of sinful conduct. We cannot suppose, however, that ideas and terms thus appropriated from common usages were employed in other than the loose, indefinite sense which alone belonged to them."

This valley was made the receptacle for all kinds of offensive matter ; and huge smouldering fires were kept burning to consume what was flung into it ; and, in places which the fire had left, the offensive worm bred. Here you have all the circumstances which enter into Christ's reference to the future place of misery, where the fire is unceasing and the worm does not die. The question of the everlastingness of the misery which Jesus refers to will

come up presently : all I wish to say here is that we push a mere illustration too far if we transfer all the local facts of the actual Gehenna near Jerusalem to the Gehenna of the unseen world. The abominable concourse of offensive matter illustrated something concerning the place of misery hereafter ; the slow, unquenched fire also illustrated something concerning it ; and the unceasing worm furnished another illustration. But we have no right to take all these symbols literally, and say that in the other life there is fire and there are worms. The phrase translated "hell-fire" is really the fire of Gehenna ; and that is as much a symbol as the saying of Jesus, "I am the bread of life ;" "I am the vine ;" "I am the door by which the sheep enter." Jesus says that, in the judgment, God will put the sheep on the right hand, and the goats on the left. What did he mean ? He was speaking of two classes of men ; and these he calls "sheep" and "goats." So here, he speaks of Gehenna fire ; but the expression is clearly suggestive and illustrative, and is one that becomes even absurd when taken literally ; for how, in the spirit-world, can there be worms and fire ?

Thus far, then as regards the place ; and now as to the *duration* of the punishment.

Here it is the custom to quote any passage which has in it the word *eternal* or *everlasting*, as though that settled the question. Now, in the *Old Testament*, nothing is plainer than that the word translated "eternal" and "for ever" really means only a long or, more usually, an indefinable and undefined time. A time was everlasting if no end could be fixed or foreseen. Thus we read of everlasting covenants that have long been forgotten, of an everlasting possession that has long come to an end, of an everlasting priesthood that has long been abolished, and of many other everlasting things that exist no longer, and that were never expected to last for ever. The Hebrew word used, in all these cases, is derived from a root meaning to hide or conceal, and thus it carries with it the idea of an indefinite time, or as long as possible. Of a certain Hebrew servant it is said, "and he shall serve his master for ever." Of a heap of stones it was said, "These shall be a memorial unto the children of Israel for ever." Of Gehazi it is said, "The leprosy of Naaman shall cleave unto thee and unto thy seed for ever." But this is quite enough to prove that, in the *Old Testament*, the word is used of a vague, long, or indefinite time.

In the New Testament we have words that are of the same character. The words are flexible and vague, and take their meaning from their relation to other words used with them. The noun *αιων* means an age, time, period, generation, or even a world, and it is the adjective formed from this that is translated *everlasting*, *eternal*, and *for ever*. One of the greatest Greek scholars that ever lived, the author of a standard Greek dictionary, says,—“I do not remember *αιων* or *αιωνιος* anywhere in the New Testament, to signify an absolute eternity.” Of the word translated *everlasting* in the New Testament, he says,—“like the substantive, it is used of any space of time.” In the Epistle of Jude, it is said that Sodom and Gomorrha and the cities about them suffered “the vengeance of eternal fire.” And yet any one who will take the trouble may go to the spot now and see that the fires are all quite out. I am not one of those who feel absolutely certain that none of those who wrote of *everlasting* punishment and so forth in the New Testament meant *never-ending* punishment, but this I do say, that the Greek word is so exceedingly vague, and the habits of thought in ancient times were also so vague, that it is pushing doubtful language too

far, and making too much of figure and illustration, when these passages are taken as teaching the never-ending misery of hell. Other words are not pushed to that extreme literal meaning. For instance, we have the phrase "everlasting destruction." Now, if the word "everlasting" is taken to mean never ending, why is not the word "destruction" taken to mean literal destruction, dissolution, and consequent death? Again, it says, "He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." Here again, if the word "unquenchable" is taken literally, why not the words, "burn up"? But we should then have some hope of the poor creatures being put out of their misery: so the phrase "burn up" is taken as a figure, but "unquenchable" is clung to in all its bare literality! Now this word "unquenchable" in the old works of Greek writers means, not never ending, but not subduable till its work is done. Thus Homer uses it of the fire that is destroying a ship, and Eusebius of the fire that is destroying a martyr. What prevents, then, that in the case of hell it should mean—not quenchable while any evil remains to be purged away? Again, it is said that the wicked shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second

death. Is there real "fire" in hell, then, and real "brimstone"? Then, is there real "death" in hell? If not, why not? It is clear, then, that there is a good deal of vagueness about all these words, and much that is rhetorical and figurative. Is it not pushing a point too far, then, when Jesus himself is quoted as the teacher of never-ending punishments, on the strength of what?—on the strength of three, only *three*, passages wherein he used the word everlasting in connection with the word punishment or fire. It should also be remembered that the word in question was used in such a sense by the fathers of the Church, as to permit of them saying that the wicked would be eternally punished, and then, afterward, annihilated. Clearly, then, the word meant something different from never-ceasing. My own opinion is that the word "eternal" was simply used in contrast with the idea of "temporal" or in time:—in that case, eternal punishment would simply mean punishment in the eternal state, without any reference to duration.

But it is quite a common thing to hear the retort that "the eternal happiness of the saved rests upon the same basis as the eternal misery of the lost. If the word is indefinite in the one case, so may it be in the other." So it

may ; but, for the bliss of God's beloved we depend not on a mere word, or on a collection of texts. We ought to require very strict proof before we believe that God will *torment* His children for ever, but we do not need much evidence to prove that He will love and bless His children for ever. The doctrine of eternal *punishments* rests on a few doubtful passages, and finds no confirmation in the character of God ; but the doctrine of the eternal happiness of the redeemed rests upon a rich store of plain Bible promises, and upon all we know of the Father's love and mercy. As one of our liberal thinkers has well put it :—

“ For the eternally-enduring life of the righteous we have the direct assurance supplied by numerous and unequivocal expressions ; by the revealed attributes of the Almighty, and the broad features of the gospel method of salvation. To imagine that the blessedness of the saved will ever either cease or deteriorate, is to run counter to all the knowledge which the Bible furnishes, and to every thought which a cultivated mind can seriously entertain. We seek in vain to discover a rational pretext for suspicion that the happiness of the righteous will be less than everlasting. But when we turn from the duration of future joys to the duration of

future sufferings, the statement of evidence must confessedly be, at every step, reversed. The eternity of future punishment is not declared in varied and unequivocal expressions; it is not demanded by the attributes of God; it is not a necessary concomitant of the Gospel method of salvation; and so far are we from being unable to discover a rational pretext for doubting it, that reasons against it crowd in upon us unsought."

Thus far, then, briefly, as to the passages that relate to the place of punishment and the duration of punishment. In both cases, I have shewn that we have a mass of vague language, abounding in rhetorical and figurative expressions, with words that once bore meanings very different from those which we attach to them now.

I now pass on, finally, to the teachings of the Bible which are clearly on the other side. I began by saying that the Bible is an inconsistent book. That is plain English; but "orthodoxy" says that the Bible is a self-interpreting book. The meaning is really the same. What "orthodoxy" means is that one passage is to be modified or illuminated by another. What I mean is that we must distinguish one from another, and, of two, take the best and that which is likeliest to be true.

But, accepting the exhortation of "orthodoxy," I propose to interpret the obscure by the plain, and the vague by the emphatic. It is very doubtful what a few passages concerning eternal punishment mean; but it is not at all doubtful what a whole host of passages mean that tell of the inexhaustible mercy of God. On the principle, then, that the Bible explains itself, let us bring up the myriad torches that describe God's Love and Justice, to illumine these caverns of despair.

And here, it matters not whether we turn to the Old Testament or to the New. The store-house is full of treasures. In the Psalms we read, "The Lord is gracious and full of compassion: the Lord is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works." Is He good to the lost, then? and are His tender mercies over them? In the Psalms, again, we read—"The Lord is righteous in all His ways, and holy in all His works." But could He be "righteous" and "holy" if, for the sins of a poor short life, He took away from His children the very power to repent, and spent eternity in crushing them with unceasing misery? In the Psalms once more, we read—"His mercy endureth for ever," and, "Then will I visit their transgressions with the rod, and their iniquity

with stripes. Nevertheless, my loving kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail." In the Book of the Lamentations we read—"But though He cause grief, yet will He have compassion, according to the multitude of His mercies. For He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men." In Isaiah we read—"Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee." Could anything be more tender, more comprehensive, more conclusive, than that? In Isaiah, again, we read—"I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth." That is directly at variance with the doctrine of an eternal hell where God will inflict or permit eternal torment. In Micah we read—"He retaineth not His anger for ever, because He delighteth in mercy. He will subdue our iniquities, and cast all our sins into the depths of the sea." That is exactly the truth here being developed. The heavenly Father will, by discipline, "subdue our iniquities," and then His mercy, and not His anger, will triumph for ever. These are the words of trust in God that meet us, all the way from David onward; and, when we step into the New Testament,

we step into an atmosphere of love. God is our Father, and we are to be like Him; He is kind to the evil and the unthankful. He will have all men to be saved; and, at last, every creature in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea—in fact, the whole creation—shall cry, “Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne and unto the Lamb for ever.” In the first Epistle to the Corinthians Paul tells us that the end will come, when Jesus “shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet.” But how can Jesus be said to have put down all antagonism, and subdued all enmity, if an eternal hell, filled with blaspheming or horror-stricken spirits, is to remain in existence for ever. The two things are utterly inconsistent and contradictory. Paul then goes on to say that “God will be all in all.” But how can that be if He does not or cannot overcome the misery and the sin of an eternal hell? Paul’s Epistles are rich in brilliant expressions that guide us here. It seems almost impossible that he could have believed in an eternal hell, with his magnificent views of the

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final triumph of God over all evil. "Where sin abounded," said he, "grace did much more abound." "Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance? God forbid; for how then shall God judge the world?" That is to say,—How could He be a true judge if He were unjust? But He would be unjust if He did all that it is said He will do to the "lost." Of Jesus he says, that he is the head of every man, and that all tongues shall confess him to the glory of God the Father.

What are we to do, then? Sit in the shadow of the few dark passages that may be made to mean that God will torture some of us for ever, or come out into the sunlight of these glorious hopes and promises of the true Gospel of glad tidings? We ought to feel ourselves free to confess that the Bible has *two* voices, and to choose the more hopeful, or say that one part needs to be explained by another. In either case, we should come to the conclusion that the burden of evidence vastly preponderates in favour of the eternal goodness of God, and not His eternal hate, and that the general teaching of the Bible, concerning man's destiny in a future life, abundantly justifies the belief that he is destined, in God's good providence, to a life of progress, the end

of which shall be the manifestation of the power, and righteousness, and goodness of God to all.

A RATIONAL VIEW OF MAN'S DESTINY IN A FUTURE LIFE.

If anything has been demonstrated in the foregoing pages it has been this,—that we need a more rational view of man's destiny in the life beyond the grave. We have had too much that is unnatural, arbitrary, unreasonable; we need to be brought back to sober inference, to homely sense, to rational faith. Men have drawn too sharp a line between that life and this, and have too readily assumed that this was man's only time of trial, and that, at death, angels took him up to a place called heaven, or demons dragged him down to a place called hell. These gross, vulgar, earthly conceptions of the spirit-world must all be outgrown:—they will be outgrown,—and men will come to see that, after death, the life of the soul is continued with no very violent changes, and that the shuffling off of this mortal coil produces no miraculous, much less final, change in our condition. A spirit is a man out of the body, that is all. I can quite understand a man denying that

who denies a future life altogether; but I cannot understand the denial of that on the part of anyone who believes in immortality at all.

This being understood, then,—that a spirit is simply a human being under spiritual conditions in the spirit-world, what is the true idea of the spirit-life? All the inner faculties are spirit; all the inner and vital forces of our being are spirit. The will, the conscience, the sense of personal identity, the memory, affection,—all are spirit; and these will be possessions or parts of self-hood in the spirit-world. The probability, then, is that they who leave the body and enter into vital relationship with spiritual things and spiritual beings are very little altered. They have lost the use of the physical body; but they have gained the use of far finer powers suited to a far finer world. They have done with the dust, but have begun with the essences. The self-hood is the same. They will find a few dear old friends again; they will be welcomed as new comers into some congenial society; they may find they have contracted some spiritual wounds or blemishes that sadly need attention, but surely they are the same. What need to imagine that they will at once mount up or be carried up to a

place called heaven?—or sink down or be flung down to a place called hell? I think they will do neither. I think they will stay here for awhile, till they comprehend the change that has come over them, and then will probably find that they are as much the creatures of choice and will as ever; and that the “great white throne” and a God whom the eyes could see are as far off as ever. In a word, reason and common-sense, and God’s beautiful steady laws, all conspire to teach us that the other world is a world of law and order, as this is, and that people who go there are as much and as truly human beings and free agents as they are here.

Of course, this idea of the future life will greatly affect the views taken of future *punishment*. In fact, one of the first effects of that idea will be the discarding of the idea of punishment altogether. I do not mean the discarding of the idea of suffering and sorrow and retribution, and the need of hard toil to recover lost ground: but what I do mean is, that we shall discard the idea of direct, outward, and forced punishment, involved in the idea of a hell, filled with fiends, and with instruments of torture. *That* idea we shall discard, and, in the place of it, we shall put nature and the God

of nature, with the eternal law that "whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." The suffering of consequences we shall not discard; but we shall rather affirm and enforce it.

All moral distinctions, then, will exist, in their almost infinite variety, and all will be justly and naturally dealt with. The "orthodox" doctrine confounds all these distinctions. It divides the eternal world into two places, into one of which all must go. The consequence of this is that all the facts of human life are roughly and cruelly ignored, and, with an amazing disregard of sense and right, the serious distinctions of character, and the equally serious distinctions of desert, are altogether disregarded. But, with the idea of the future life I am suggesting, all these distinctions will be as much recognized and as much provided for as they are here. There will be no hasty, harsh, and final lines of demarcation drawn. The same variety will be observable in temperament and character, and the same varied and blessed forces will be at work to lead *all* men upward or to give them the opportunity to rise.

It is assumed, by the teachers of the "orthodox" doctrine, that the most precious faculty we have will, at death, cease to be our own,—I mean, the faculty of choice and the consequent ability

to change and amend. There is something so horribly cruel in this that I wonder the very atrocity of it has not prevented men believing in it. It is the power of choice and the ability to amend that distinguish man from the lower animals, and that give the only real dignity and value to life; and yet we are told that, at death, this will cease! God will continue all our powers of sensation; He will sharpen our capacity for bearing pain; He will quicken memory, and intensify remorse; but the only thing that would give His wretched creatures a chance of improving He will take away. Just at the very time when the will would be most open to influence, it is to be made helpless. Just at the moment when all the truth dawns upon the soul, the power to choose is withdrawn! If that is the providence of a *God*, I should like to know what is the malice of a fiend.

Strip man of his will, take from him his power of choice, and what is there left that makes a man a man? And can we think that it will add anything to the glory of the great God to torment for ever such helpless and pitiful objects as men without wills would become? Note also, here, the enormous assumption that all men here do have a fair chance of choosing. When

we object to eternally fixing a man's state at death, we are told that the man has had his probation, that he has had the two roads put before him, that he has made his choice, that he is, therefore, responsible, and that God is perfectly just in damning him for ever. It is unspeakably cruel and unjust. It is not even true. Consider how men and women are born, and bred, and educated, and worked ; consider what a multitude of sharp and distracting cares wait at the poor man's door, to snatch the child from the cradle, and turn it prematurely into a careworn man ; consider how we are hurried on from year to year, our childhood a vacancy, our boyhood a dream, our youth a passion, our manhood a bewildering care, and our ending perhaps coming upon us like the lightning's flash, to close the perplexing scene ; and *then* say whether we ought to believe that this chance is all—that the future world is all heaven and hell,—perfect bliss or unspeakable woe,—and that God has actually put poor men here, to decide in such a world as this their never-ending fate. No ; I could sooner give up my faith in God altogether than believe this of Him :—and this is what many men *have* done.

Here, then, with all my heart and soul I am at one with the truth, not grasped by one

in a thousand perhaps, but none the less true for that—*that death is an advantage for every man*, that removal to another world is *not* removal from mercy to mercilessness, is *not* removal from love to vengeance, is *not* removal from pity to eternal doom; but that death is removal to more perfect light, to fresh discipline, to vaster aids, to clearer perceptions, to a better order, to nobler chances and more glorious opportunities of which perhaps the souls of the worst of men may finally take advantage and begin to rise to newness of life. And it seems to me that we *must* believe in this if we are to believe at all in a wise, a just, a holy, a merciful, a righteous, and an all-powerful God.

Upon what, then, do we base these conclusions? Are we merely guessing in cherishing this faith? *No*: we are reasoning from the known to the unknown, from the seen to the unseen, from God's Providence here to God's Providence hereafter. We find, in this life, that all God's laws are made for our good. Laws that, in our ignorance, we deemed cruel, or, at best, unfriendly, we find to be our safeguards and our friends; and, in every direction, we are coming to see that every law of nature has been established for our good.

If, then, that is so here, may it not be, nay, must it not be so hereafter? We find here, that the retributions of earth are for our good; that when we sow tares, it would do us harm to let us reap wheat; and that we learn wisdom and carefulness and fidelity by being allowed to reap tares, when we have sown tares. It is a kind and merciful law, then, a law intended for our good, as a part of our education, that we are bound down to our actions, and rise or fall with them. We find mere punishment nowhere. We find vengeance and spite nowhere. We find everywhere a law of consequences intended for our good. Have we, then, any right to imagine that God will work a miracle to make it otherwise in the life to come?

It is, then, a merely arbitrary, and by no means inviting assumption that, in the life to come, men will neither be able to will nor to repent. It is sometimes said that the lost will be punished eternally because they will go on sinning eternally; but surely if the lost have the power to sin they have the power not to sin, if they have the power to will evil, they have the power to will good; unless, indeed, God will work a double miracle, to make them able only to will to sin; but, in that case,

God would not only be the author of their misery but of their sin. But why should we assume anything so dreadful as that God's lost children can only sin? Nay, why may we not go farther, and say, that in the other life the sinner will have a far better chance of recovery than here? With the death of the body there may be a death or a decay of many merely animal and fleshly temptations and weaknesses; and the soul, delivered from that body, may really find swifter deliverance from evil.

But as regards the retributions of the future life, we shall not go far wrong if we begin to judge of God's ways where He begins to show them. We find that His punishments *here* are for our good. We find that in this life all experience comes by repeated discipline, and that discipline involves repeated pain. We learn to be wise through suffering the pangs that come of our folly; and we come to knowledge only by the rough road filled with the perils and the pains of our ignorance. This is God's method with us now; and we have every reason to conclude it will be His method with us hereafter, since He is the "unchanging God."

We bless God, then, for the emancipation that has come,—that we believe no more in a

hell without a hope, a doom without a God, a punishment without a purpose, and a misery without an end. We bless Him that we have learnt to trust Him as One who will ever wait to befriend us, and not as One who will take delight in swiftly casting us from Him as sheep to the slaughter. We bless Him that His anger is not against His sons but against their sins, that He never changes,—to-day merciful, to-morrow implacable; to-day forgiving, to-morrow relentless; here offering hope to us, and pouring the fire of His fury upon our brethren there. We bless Him that this dreadful dream has vanished, and that, in its place, we have the clear shining of a loving Father's face.

A rational view of man's destiny in a future life, then, leads to the conclusion to which by so many ways we have now come,—that the life hereafter is a natural, orderly, progressive continuation of life here; that the experiment tried here amid so many disadvantages, will be continued there with the help of wiser teachers, and with liberated powers; that the poor souls who come into this world they know not how, and toil and stumble through it they know not why, and go out of it they know not whither, will pass into the world where the Lord God will give them light, and, at last, wipe away all

tears from their eyes; that the good, the wise, the merciful will go to "serve God day and night in His temple," not by surrounding Him to offer songs of adulation, but by finding out His children to bless them, encouraging the despairing, healing the sick of soul, turning the discord of disobedience and fear into the harmony of willing service and loving trust,—so making all spheres His "temple," and all well-doing His praise.

It is a thought that harmonises with all we know now of the Providence of God, and the laws of this house of the Lord in which we are to-day. It is a thought that throws light on most of the dark problems connected with the inequalities and sorrows and struggles of human existence here. It is a thought that makes all life, both here and there, an orderly and progressive development; the great transition called "death" being only one step in the wonderful unfolding of human existence. It is a thought that fills the universe with hope and light, and that we can cherish and thank God for as we pray the prayer of Jesus, and say, "Our Father, who art in Heaven."







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